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Gnome

THE decision of the highly-respected chief executive of the Football Association to resign his position, as a result of a brief liaison with his personal assistant, has set a most unfortunate precedent which can only be a cause of acute distress to captains of industry such as myself.

It is a long-established tradition in all walks of life for those occupying senior positions of authority, whether in politics, industry or sport, that they will form intimate relationships with gorgeous, pouting secretaries.

As readers well know, I myself have long been accustomed to offset the strains and stress of major decision-making by seeking solace in the company of my faithful masseuse Miss Rita Chevrolet.

Mr Palios has done the world of high-flying movers and shakers no favours by his disgraceful decision to resign.

E. Strobes,
pp. Lord Gnome,
Motel Casanova,
Sicily

"Quick! Ambulance! I've broken my fist punching a paramedic"

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ABC

Scoring in extra time...

■ Alastair Campbell goes for gold 5
■ Curse of Gnome: Condliffe revisited 7
■ Tara P-T's pro-celeb booby prize 8
■ Neasden shock: Big Ron's night of shame 18
■ Chick 'n' dick-lit with Tony Parsons 24
■ Top brass: where there's muck... 27

IT HAS just been revealed that Deloitte, one of the notorious "Big Four" accountancy firms, had a bumper year in 2003/04. Average partner salaries at the top tax-avoidance outfit went up to around £600,000, with senior partner John Connolly trousering £2.8m to become Britain's most highly paid bean-counter.

Connolly has come a long way since 1995 when he had to pay £40,000 costs and was officially reprimanded by the accountants' joint disciplinary scheme (JDS) for his role in the Barlow Clowes affair in the 1980s. The JDS found that, in failing to provide accurate financial information about the company to potential purchasers, Connolly "fell below the standard which should be displayed by and may properly be expected of a chartered accountant".

He clearly took this criticism to heart and is now displaying exactly the standards that may properly be expected of a top chartered accountant: enormous pay and prolific tax avoidance.

MEANWHILE, partners at another of the "Big Four", KPMG, face a £65m bill following a high court judgment last week obliging them to make good the vast deficit in the staff pension fund.

In going to court, KPMG appears to have been deaf to the pleas of several former partners who wrote to chairman Mike Rake saying: "We urge the board to make substantial enhancements to its likely proposals, to avoid KPMG being viewed as greedy and dishonourable in obtaining commercial advantage at the expense of pensioners and staff."

Mike Rake became KPMG chairman in 2002 with a pledge to restore credibility and integrity to the accountancy profession in the wake of Enron and similar scandals. Announcing record results in 2003 (and record pay for himself), Rake launched the firm's "Global Initiative on Leadership and Business Ethics" and, modestly, the Nobel Peace Center. Rake proclaimed that "KPMG's participation as the Nobel Center's global founding partner underscored our belief that all individuals and businesses must strive to contribute to the well-being of their communities".

Unless, it seems, the community in question includes the firm's own retired employees.

THE tragic tale of Castle Tioram, the 13th century Highland home of Clanranald, has captured the imagination of the *Daily Telegraph*.

The paper reported at some length on 23 July the heroic efforts of Ayrshire-based businessman Lex Brown to restore the ruin, constantly blocked by Historic Scotland. "We have the support of every reputable body in Scotland apart from this clique," fumed Mr Brown, coyly identified as having made his fortune in the "air cargo business".

Former business associates wonder if this is the same Lex Brown who was arms dealer of choice for those other well-known conservationists, Executive Outcomes and Sandline, that provided "military services" to Sierra Leone, Angola and Papua New Guinea. That Lex Brown was always even-handed, supplying guns to both sides in the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea and making sure that Sri Lanka and Rwanda didn't go without either. Such a Damascene conversion from the destruction business would surely be cause to rejoice!

HOW typical of the home office to try to distance itself from the decision, upheld by the appeal court, that innocent people wrongly convicted should be charged for their board and lodging while in prison.

A home office spokesman maintained that it was an independent assessor, Lord Brennan QC, who decided that a charge of around £60 a week for a stinking cell and prison porridge should be deducted from any compensation the victim of the miscarriage of justice might receive.

As everyone knows, Brennan was appointed by the home office, which was as anxious to reduce spiralling compensation bills as it was to replace Sir David Calcutt QC, seen as too generous in his assessments. It was Brennan, from Cherie Blair's Matrix chambers, who duly came up with the idea of charging those who are wrongly imprisoned for food and lodging.

In the case of the men wrongly accused of the murder of newspaper boy Carl Bridgewater, that meant charging them for 18 years of being forced to slop out and eat food contaminated with other inmates' urine and ground glass. Perhaps a better way to reduce compensation costs would be to ensure safeguards are in place throughout the criminal justice system so fewer people are jailed for crimes they did not commit.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

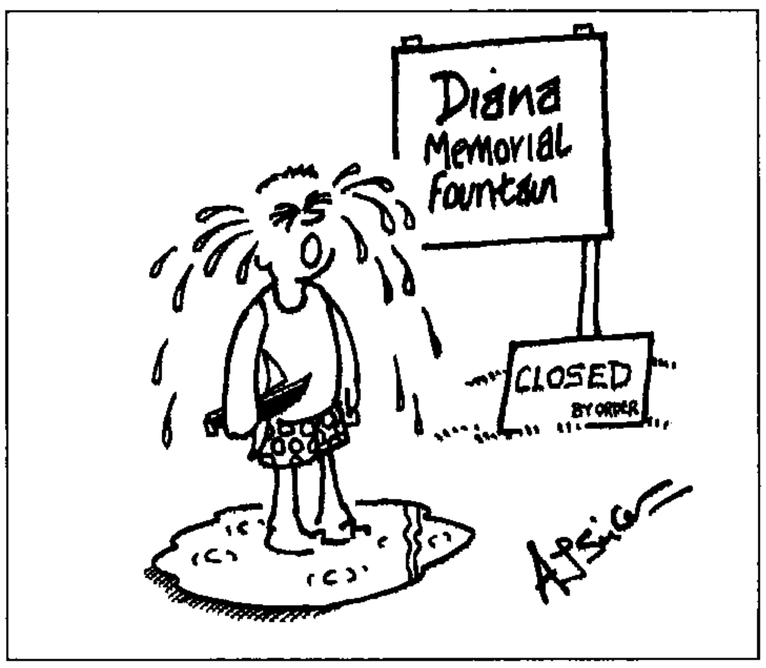
"This appointment of Mandelson shows that the European Union is a gravy train for failed politicians."

— **Robert Kilroy-Silk,** the failed Westminster politician who is now, er, an MEP.

BARCLAYS Bank may have frozen six British National Party accounts following the BBC's *Secret Agent* documentary, but the bank still has some way to go if it is to shake off its own dodgy past in the area of race relations.

Barclays has now been included in a $20m lawsuit filed against various western corporations for their close business ties to the apartheid administration. The company is already having to defend itself against claims that it took advantage of these ties to exploit black labour.

Strangely, the bank's website seems to have a very short-term memory, helpfully explaining that "Barclays has had a presence in South Africa for five years and has been closely associated with all phases of the country's development." So that's all right then.



Street Of Shame

NEWS that the parents of a teenage murder victim blamed the Playstation 2 game *Manhunt* for inciting his killer prompted high street chain Dixons to pull in some welcome publicity (*surely "do its duty as a responsible retailer?" Ed.*) by banning the game from its stores.

This will certainly succeed in putting the ultra-violent horror-fest ("the UK's must-have game" – *News of the World*, January 2004) beyond the reach of many young gamers – not least because Dixons had been offering it for around £20 less than most shops, at a pocket money-friendly £19.99.

But even this was not enough for the tabloids, which demanded an all-out ban on violent games. "Sicko Games Scandal" shrieked the *Sun* on 30 July over a full-page review of "the most bloodthirsty games on the market" – titles like Gladiator ("blood-spattered"), Grand Theft Auto ("killing for fun"), Backyard Wrestling ("about as bloody as they come") and The Suffering ("harrowing stuff").

It was only towards the end of that afternoon that the management of the *Sun*'s own online mail order service – www.thesun.co.uk/shop – realised it might be a good idea to remove them from sale.

GOT a house to sell? An ad in the London *Evening Standard*'s Homes and Property section will set you back £100 per column centimetre. But bash out a bit of copy about how great it is to live there, do a quick trawl of some other local properties that are on the market, and they'll pay *you* to feature it in their pages!

That's what financial hack Alison Mitchell did last month with a lavishly-illustrated double page spread headlined "Match Made in Heaven", singing the praises of three properties on the market in Portugal, one of which just happened to belong to her (though readers remained ignorant of this coincidence).

After negotiations with the press complaints commission, the paper printed a "clarification" last week – but not without protestations from Homes and Property editor Janice Morley that she was "completely aware" Mitchell was using the piece to plug her own house, "as, frequently, do other case histories in our pages".

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Arrogant, yes, but the French know how to run trains." — *Independent on Sunday*, 17 July, p39.

"Computer failure throws French railways into confusion during holiday." — *Independent on Sunday*, 17 July, p26.

DID David Yelland's new colleagues at PR firm Weber Shandwick bother to read any of his past columns in the *Times* before handing him a job?

They could be forgiven for not having done so since most of them looked like coded pleas to Rupert Murdoch to reward his loyal foot-soldier with a proper role at News International (see Yellandwatch, *Eye* 1109).

But they might have learnt something if they had scanned his contribution on 12 September last year. "In extremis, PR does not matter," Yelland wrote at the time. "Taking the long-term view requires vision. It does not, necessarily, require friends in the media. That's why ex-journalists often fail to make good PR advisers."

Is it too late to tear up that job offer?

SUNDAY Sport publisher David Sullivan used his "Voice of Common Sense" column to come out in support of FA chief executive Mark Palios.

"I knew about Palios's affair six months ago, but we did not print the gossip in *Daily Sport* or *Sunday Sport* because we do not take delight in ruining people's lives."

Sullivan's noble privacy policy was not, of course, in anyway negated by that day's front page – "CHARLOTTE CHURCH'S AMAZING TOPLESS PHOTOS – 100% UNCENSORED – PAGE 18". And nor by the eight-page "Ayia Napa Sex Boat Supplement" featuring holidaymakers snapped unawares in compromising positions.

THE death of former Nixon aide Fred LaRue in a Mississippi hotel room last week had the *Guardian* salivating at the thought that "one of the longest-running mysteries in American politics may soon be resolved... Although there have been several names advanced as Deep Throat in the Watergate scandal, LaRue is one of the more likely candidates", reported Dan Glaister from Los Angeles.

Several names have indeed been advanced, not least in the pages of the *Guardian*, which only last April was enthusiastically reporting that the *Washington Post*'s infamous informant had been definitively unmasked – "It's not interpretation, it's not guesswork" – by a US academic as former White House lawyer Fred Fielding. Oddly neither LaRue nor Fielding had featured on the *Guardian*'s 30th anniversary suspect list in June 2002, which instead pointed the finger at "Pat Buchanan, a former Nixon speechwriter... another speechwriter, Ray Brice, another aide, Steve Bull, and even Ron Ziegler, the White House press secretary". (But on that occasion the paper didn't even get the name of its own source right, offering a shamefaced admission in the Corrections and Clarifications column that "The former White House counsel planning to reveal the identity of the Watergate whistle-blower is John Dean, and not John Dixon").

Just a month previously, a breathless Matthew Engel had reported from Washington that "one of the most mysterious figures in American political history may finally have been revealed... Mark Felt, a former assistant director of the FBI, has been named in print as Deep Throat".

Felt had in fact been named in print before – not least in the *Guardian*, in April 1994, when he was fingered as a prime suspect. On that occasion, however, the paper had the decency to offer nine alternative candidates alongside him. So in summary – *Guardian* Exclusive: Deep Throat Could Have Been Just About Anybody.

BODY language expert Judi James has carved out a lucrative career analysing hand movements, facial ticks and the like, supposedly explaining the subtle signals put out by politicians, celebs and royals.

Her weekly Body Talk page in the *Mail on Sunday*'s You throwaway recently examined a photo of actors Kirsten Dunst and Jake Gyllenhaal. "The hand over the chest gesture is an interesting one, with several potential interpretations," James noted.

"Between lovers, such as actors Kirsten and Jake, the gesture becomes a bit of a mongrel. Kirsten is placing her hand over Jake's heart to remind him that this is the part she most wants to control. Despite the jokey smiles, there is probably quite a high degree of commitment in this relationship."

Whoops! As Associated Press had reported just four days earlier: "Kirsten Dunst and Jake Gyllenhaal, the young stars of two of Hollywood's big summer movies, have ended their romance. Dunst, the co-star of *Spider-Man 2*, and Gyllenhaal, who appears in the disaster epic, *The Day After Tomorrow*, have gone their separate ways." As Gyllenhaal's publicist told AP: "They broke up some time ago."

So much for commitment.

BEREFT of editorial cash since Conrad Black spent it all on shoes for Barbara, the *Sunday Telegraph Magazine* came up with a cheap-and-cheerful way to fill its pages.

It invited readers to send in "non-fiction submissions of approximately 600 words" and printed them without payment or even bothering to acknowledge their receipt. One such submission, from a Collette Drifte, was the hoary old tale of the busy shopper whose Kit Kat is stolen and eaten by a stranger in a crowded teashop, only for her to discover, post-reprimand, that her own chocolate bar is still intact in her handbag.

Yes, this is the same incident that Dawn French claimed in an interview a few years ago had happened to her, that Douglas Adams recounted in his 1988 novel *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*, and which the online dictionary of urban legends, Snopes.com, maintains has "circulated in Great Britain since at least 1972".

"Do you have a story to tell?" asks the desperate *Sunday Telegraph*. It might add: "If not, why not do the one about the burglars and the toothbrushes, that always goes down well..."

BELEAGUERED hacks at the London *Evening Standard* have been told they cannot claim any expenses at all this month.

There are no exceptions either: the ban applies equally to the editor and to the lowliest cub reporter. How opportune that editor Veronica Wadley has chosen August to take her annual holiday in the US.

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Property Express

"THESE women want to get on, to smash through the glass ceiling – and then when they get there they start caterwauling about a bit of chauvinism. What about freedom, liberty and a chap's right to make a joke in the office?" Thus *Daily Telegraph* associate editor Daniel Johnson, at a recent morning conference, on the outbreak of "Sexism in the City" litigation.

"Take your point, Dan," retorted the *Torygraph*'s newly emboldened editor, Martin Newland. "But if one of these geezers said sumfink like that to your missus you'd rip his head off and shit in his neck, right?"

The hapless Johnson, used to the more rarefied comments of former editor Charles "Lord Snooty" Moore, failed to reply, instead bowing his head in the manner of one about to be separated from it.

IN A rare scoop, the *Sunday Times* revealed two weeks ago that Arsenal football club pays bonuses to its top players through a series of offshore companies and trusts, leaving the average first team star with a 20 percent tax bill rather than the standard 40 percent for high-earners.

It is not clear whether the *Sunday Times* article was the first in a series of tax avoidance exposés. If the paper is looking for other examples, a good place to start would be the global media group that is notorious for tax-dodging through a series of subsidiary companies in the Cayman Islands, British Virgin Islands, Bermuda and numerous other tax havens. The company is of course News Corporation, owner of the *Sunday Times*.

When News Corp moved its HQ from Australia to New York in April this year, it was quick to reassure investors that it wouldn't suddenly start paying tax. As finance director David Defoe cheerfully explained: "There's no tax on any of the operations of News Corp." Indeed not. But *why* not? One for the Insight team, surely.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"The *Daily Express* description of Michael Howard's lacklustre performance in the House of Commons as 'electrifying' and 'brilliant' read like an order form for ermine." — Bill Hagerty, *Independent*, 20 July.

"Mr Howard was highly effective last week on the day the Butler report was published." — Steve Richards, *Independent*, 20 July.

FOOT BALLS

AMONG the many tributes to Paul Foot, one, in the *New Statesman*, stood out.

"My abiding memory of Paul Foot is of his tireless fight for the jobs of his staff when his team was made redundant at the *Mirror*," wrote columnist Amanda Platell. "Unlike many of the bosses at the time, he was more concerned for the people who worked for him than for himself."

Platell notes that she and Foot "were always on opposite sides of the fence", but does not go into detail. In fact, at the time Foot was fighting the mass sackings that took place at the *Daily Mirror* in 1992 and 1993, Platell, as chief executive David Montgomery's hatchet-woman, was the one handing out the dismissal envelopes, with every appearance of relish.

"It was impossible not to respect [Foot's] integrity," she adds. How would she know?

PAUL FOOT did not believe that journalists should sue other journalists, however despicable, for libel. This was fortunate for David Banks, the corpulent Montgomery lickspittle who, as "editor" of the Daily Mirror at the time of Foot's departure, issued a press statement implying that Paul was mad.

It was also fortunate for the *Daily Mail*'s Geoffrey Levy who, the day after Foot's resignation, wrote a characteristically bile-drenched piece about how "Pinko Paul" had "one Foot in the gravy train". It said Foot preached socialism while living high on the hog at the *Mirror*, inhabiting a three-office "suite" and taking long lunches for which he submitted dodgy expense claims.

When Foot's colleague Bryan Rostron read this nonsense he phoned Levy in a fury. Levy replied that he had "a good source" at the *Mirror*, but could not possibly reveal it. Rostron immediately guessed that Levy's informant was none other than David Seymour, the former pothead and NUJ FoC who had taken the Montgomery shilling as MGN's group political editor. Levy sheepishly admitted that, yes, Seymour was indeed his source.

At least Banks and Platell had the decency to stay away from Paul Foot's funeral. David Seymour, however, did not. The *Mirror* carried a report of the funeral headlined "Mourners farewell to 'inspiring' Paul Foot". The byline? David Seymour.

HACKWATCH

Alastair Campbell

ALASTAIR CAMPBELL has been a busy boy since leaving Downing Street. As well as presenting a one-man show and a series of Channel Five interviews, he somehow finds the time to produce a weekly sports column for the *Times*. Though notionally about sporting heroes, it leaves no room for doubt as to who the real hero is...

6 December 2003: But first, a diary column for the *Spectator* from Ethiopia. "I got a message from the ambassador, Fisseha Adugna, who said that I was the third most famous Briton in Ethiopia after the Queen and the prime minister, and it would be very beneficial to our countries if I agreed to go," Alastair reveals. "Though clearly nonsense, it was flattery so over the top that even I found it impossible to resist."

24 January 2004: The false modesty continues in the *Times*. "Forgive me if my first offering as a *Times* sports regular kicks off with a boastful flick back at my previous existence. It is a big boast, too, albeit in the mouth of a third party, namely former President Bill Clinton... As he and the First Lady headed for the presidential limo, he stopped, shook me by the hand and said, 'Thanks for everything'... I said, sincerely, that it had been a pleasure and an honour to work so closely, during good times and bad, with the greatest all-round political communicator of the late 20th century. He did his best clenched-jaw, bottom lip-jutting nod of appreciation and replied that it had been a pleasure working with the best communications adviser in the world."

31 January: Time to introduce some other famous friends. "Last night, with my old mates Brendan Foster, Steve Cram and several hundred other paying customers in attendance in South Shields, I did the 'world premiere', no less, of my regional theatre tour." Over the course of the next few months, the references to the theatre tour become fewer and fewer as the number of those attending becomes smaller and smaller.

21 February: What makes a good coach? Alastair consults his good friend Alex Ferguson. "I imagined a list of all-time great coaches, Sir Alex among them, and wondered whether a majority would go for Best or Di Stefano. I called Alex to have my suspicions confirmed... I will go back to the Old Trafford maestro." Indeed he will.

28 February: Straying into politics, cyclist Lance Armstrong is scornful of the idea that weapons of mass destruction will be found in Iraq. Campbell sternly advises him to "give it time". They then discuss the prime minister: "'What's Blair like?' he asks. 'He a good guy?' I say he is. 'Yeah, looks a good guy.'" That's that settled, then.

1 March: A trip to see Millwall play his beloved Burnley prompts a furious attack on the London club's tolerance of racism. Millwall chairman Theo Paphitis angrily responds by describing Campbell as a "serial sponger" who regularly asks club chairmen for free tickets, and who once asked to borrow a private helicopter to attend a game.

20 March: "I am fit, strong and healthy. I have a great family, a small number of very close friends, certainty in my political beliefs and most of my opinions, two fascinating careers behind me and all sorts of things opening up for the future," Campbell reflects, without a hint of smugness. But there's more. "Even in the short time writing this column, I have flown to Ethiopia with Brendan Foster, one of Britain's greatest athletes, to run with Haile Gebrselassie and Paul Tergat, two of Africa's greatest. I have chewed the fat with Sir Alex Ferguson... met Lance Armstrong... had my haircut complimented and coffee made for me by Sheryl Crow..." Well done, Ally!

3 April: "Aware that I regularly speak to Sir Alex Ferguson and Stan Ternent, managers respectively of Manchester United and Burnley, the prime minister would regularly ask me how they were and how they were faring with the different pressures they face," Alastair recalls. "In their own different ways, Blair, Ferguson and Ternent have leadership qualities in spades. And one thing unites them in their public pronouncements: leadership means standing up for the rest of the team." *Whoops!* A month later, Burnley dispenses with Ternent's services.

17 April: The subject this week is the greatest athletes of all time. Who better to turn to for advice than Brendan Foster, "a great athlete himself" – and, lest anyone forget, "a good friend"?

22 May: Alastair and Neil Kinnock join another close friend, Cardiff City chairman Sam Hamman, in the club's directors' box where Kinnockio compliments him on his pieces for the *Times*. We then learn which other celebs Alastair has been hanging out with this week: "When I was a member of Bill Beaumont's team at a Leukaemia Research *Question of Sport* evening on Wednesday, he gave me a fascinating analysis of the sport's greats... The other team captain, Ian Botham, and Sue Barker, the quizmaster, were a great help in suggesting over dinner which cricketers and tennis players I might go for."

29 May: One week on, Alastair can't resist another boast about his new best friend: "Bill Beaumont, whom I met recently as a member of his team at a Leukaemia Research *Question of Sport* quiz..." (*You've already done this. Ed.*)

3 July: Alastair enlists Martina Navratilova to help him choose the greatest tennis players ever. Wisely, he omits to mention the last time he met Navratilova, in his days as a sleazy *Mirror* hack, when he snuck into Wimbledon by posing as a tennis professional and tried to dig up dirt on her relationship with Judy Nelson. Presumably Navratilova hasn't twigged that it's the same man: at the time, she denounced Campbell as "scum".

10 July: At the end of Alastair's interview with former Olympic swimmer David Wilkie, readers are directed to alastaircampbell.org.uk, which describes his own preparations for a triathlon later this month. A recent entry in Alastair's online "training diary" begins: "Sorry..." Shock, horror! An apology for the dodgy dossier at last? Er, not quite. "Sorry to name drop, but this week I've had advice from Lance Armstrong..."

24 July: Who was the greatest racing driver? Alastair turns to Jackie Stewart for guidance. "I know Stewart from my days in Downing Street," he explains.

26 July: A special report on Lance Armstrong's victory in the Tour de France, "from Alastair Campbell on the Champs Elysees". Campbell reminds us that "I talked to him at Eddy Merckx's home in Belgium on the eve of the Tour", and is delighted to spot another old chum – "his girlfriend, Sheryl Crow, the rock star". Does she praise Alastair's haircut again? Astonishingly, he omits to tell us.

WHEN Owen Bennett-Jones recorded an interview with Jack Straw for BBC World Service's *Newshour* on 21 July, the foreign secretary talked about the humanitarian crisis in Darfur and how the west should handle Iran before turning to the Butler report.

Bennett-Jones wanted to know about the "missing caveats" British intelligence officers had attached to their assessments of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction but which hadn't seen the light of day in public. To whom were the caveats delivered and when?

Straw said the government had accepted responsibility for its mistakes – "some of the material in the dossier was not properly caveated". Yes, but who took the caveats out? Straw then launched into an attack on journalists who seemed to think there had been "a conspiracy to deceive the British people". Nothing could be further from the truth, he said.

At this point the broadcast interview ends rather abruptly. Sadly, time constraints stopped the BBC from broadcasting the next part of the recording, in which Bennett-Jones asked again about the caveats only for Straw to lose his cool completely and tell Bennett-Jones to "fuck off".

Norwich County Court
No. 7 of 2004
GORDON BROWN
(In Bankruptcy)

Bankruptcy Notice, Eastern Daily Press

FRESH from his success in masterminding Labour's wafer-thin by-election win at Birmingham Hodge Hill, Tom Watson MP has been sent to Hartlepool, soon to be vacated by the Prince of Darkness whom Tony Blair is sending to Brussels.

Since Peter Mandelson (for it is he) thoughtfully announced his move to Europe during the Commons recess, the by-election cannot take place in early August as planned and must now wait until the autumn. This gives Charles Kennedy and his Lib Dem chums plenty of time to hit the doorsteps; and Watson's job may be made even more difficult if Mandy succeeds in getting his chum, Patrick Diamond, selected as "new" Labour's candidate. The ultra-Blairite Diamond is seen by local comrades as a "parachuted metropolitan".

Meanwhile "new" Labour's high command has ordered the handful of local Labour parties who had been planning to select their general election candidates in late autumn to get their skates on and have it done by the end of September. Could the Dear Leader perhaps be preparing to announce a snap election during his party conference speech in Bournemouth?

SHOCKED voters in the Birmingham Hodge Hill by-election complained to local journalists about a nasty leaflet denigrating asylum seekers that dropped through their doors.

It read: "Liberal Democrat plans to give benefits to failed asylum seekers were condemned as a 'damned disgrace' by retired police officer and local resident, Roy Hunter. In a letter, Roy Hunter said that people he'd spoken to were outraged at the idea that the Lib Dems wanted to give benefit handouts to those who were trying to con their way into the country."

No, the leaflet had not been despatched by the BNP. It came from "new" Labour's candidate and eventual by-election winner by a whisker, Liam Byrne.

ON 21 July, under the front page headline "Top banks eliminate UK tax liabilities", the *Financial Times* ran a special investigation into how many profitable multinational companies pay very little tax in Britain by taking advantage of loopholes in the tax laws for international business.

The chief culprit identified by the *FT* was US investment bank Goldman Sachs, whose British company made profits of £356m in 2002 but paid no corporation tax.

As reported in the *Eye*, Goldman Sachs recently appointed ex-Arthur Andersen accountant Chris Wales to a senior position straight from the Treasury – where he had spent the previous seven years as special adviser on tax to Gordon Brown. Among the important subjects on which he advised the Chancellor were the selfsame tax laws that his new employer manages to side-step so easily.

FOLLOWING defence secretary Geoff Hoon's trip to Iraq in June, MoD officials made a series of courtesy calls to Basra to see how his visit had been received on the ground.

In response the wing commander of the joint helicopter force quoted from *The Forked Tongue,* the unit's in-house newsletter, which claims to be "published in the heat of the Iraqi sun and printed on recycled next-of-kin forms". Its report was as follows: "The visit by the Right Honourable Geoff Hoon was lauded as a huge success for morale and a giant leap forward for political progress in Iraq. 'Everyone thought the visit went exceptionally well', said Iraqi Information Minister Said Al Ali. On other pages: Pumas can lift more than Chinooks, the move to tented accommodation really is a good idea, and salmon live in trees and eat pencils."

This brought a swift response from the vice chief of the defence staff that he be supplied with a full set of copies of the magazine "as a useful indicator of morale". A copy of the latest edition – complete with its front page scoop "massive alcoholic orgy at Iraq's only permitted beer making factory cancelled due to organisational errors" – has duly been sent to Whitehall.

LAST week's local by-election victory for George Galloway's Respect outfit in a previously rock solid Labour ward in Tower Hamlets has increased the chances of local pro-war, Labour MP Oona King facing a direct challenge for her seat at the general election from Respect's own Gorgeous George.

Galloway has already signalled that he will not stand in the redrawn Glasgow Central constituency, and Tower Hamlets is much more convenient to the Commons and Heathrow airport.

Warballs

● "September 11, 2001, was a day when the world shook but for Scottish football a single event 24 hours earlier was also to have shattering significance. For that was the day when the Bank of Scotland's takeover by Halifax was officially confirmed." — **Press Association.**

● "But in the aftermath of 9/11, Higham says, coolness has simply lost its lustre. 'If global terrorism means each of us could die tomorrow,' he asks, 'why bother leaving the right book out on the coffee table or having the right haircut?'" — **The *Times*.**

● "'As we pressed north, radars on and warning receivers showing little activity, we watched the bombing of Baghdad,' recalls Tornado pilot Wing Commander 'Moose' Poole of his part in the RAF raids on the Iraqi capital last year. 'Explosions under the cloud cover looked like the sort of light show that the Ministry of Sound might use, only this outdoor concert wasn't at Wembley.'" — ***RAF: The Official Magazine*.**

THE PHILISTINE POET LAUREATE WAS VERY POPULAR

THE near-invisible general-secretary of the TUC, Brendan Barber, has cheered the battered infantry at Congress House by breaking the habit of a life time and losing his temper in spectacular fashion with the prime minister.

The final straw for mild-mannered Barber was the Dear Leader's very public refusal to sign up to the European Union's charter of rights at work. Since this made it virtually impossible for the pro-European TUC to campaign for a "yes" vote in the coming referendum on the proposed European constitution, Barber got into a shouting and swearing match with a shocked Tony Blair inside 10 Downing Street.

Barber reminded the PM in no uncertain fashion that his job was to side with the workers and not the employers when the chips were down. Not that any of this will make the slightest difference to Blair. He still expects the unions to cough up for the general election and campaign for a "yes" vote in the referendum.

WORLD OF SPORT

THE decline of British athletics continues, with the country's runners, jumpers and throwers going to Athens with only one – Paula Radcliffe – given any chance of winning an Olympic gold medal.

But if medals were awarded for bungling incompetence, there'd certainly be a gold for Fast Track, the promotions agency headed by old track stars Alan Pascoe and Lord Coe, which set up the sport's multi-million pound BBC deal and runs the major meetings in this country.

Fast Track press officers have spent most of the summer bellyaching about the sport's lack of coverage in the press, largely because of the on-going Balco drugs scandal in the United States. Yet that did not stop Fast Track paying a reputed $100,000 appearance fee earlier this summer to Marion Jones, the triple Olympic gold medallist at the centre of the doping controversy. Jones flew in, did her long jump, and then flew home – doing little to help sell tickets at the Gateshead meeting, where the stands were barely half full.

Making payments to suspected drugs cheats seems an odd way to improve the image of athletics. But for an organisation so concerned about avoiding "negative" stories, Fast Track has a rare talent for sabotaging its own efforts. Earlier this year, in anticipation of the appearance of Kim Collins at its meetings, Fast Track arranged and paid for sports hack Ian Stafford to visit the 100m world and Commonwealth champion at his training base in Texas. What angle did Stafford take in the *Mail on Sunday*? A two-page splash on how American athletics is rife with drugs!

The Curse of Gnome

"You lied?"
"I'm not proud of it, but I did."

AT Truro county court on 28 July, Cornish accountant John Stuart Condliffe calmly 'fessed up to fibbing to his own lawyers at Peter Carter-Ruck (PCR) about how he planned to fund his marathon libel action against the *Eye*.

Condliffe was subjected to a public examination in front of district judge Thomas after two years of obfuscation as to what assets his creditors (including, of course, the *Eye*'s solicitors Davenport Lyons) should be able to get their hands on.

Condliffe was made bankrupt in 2002 after withdrawing his libel claim and agreeing to pay £100,000 towards the *Eye*'s costs following nine years of legal wrangling and six weeks at the high court. As long-time readers will recall, Condliffe attempted to sue the magazine over an article in 1992 which alleged that he had acted dishonestly by overcharging clients for accountancy work.

Since 2002 the bankruptcy trustee, whose role is to collect up all assets from the bankrupt's estate and distribute them between creditors, has been trying to get a clear picture of what Condliffe actually owns. Requests for information have not been answered or have been met with complaints and demands that the trustee allow him to go ahead with an attempt to sue PCR in order to raise funds to pay everyone else. Condliffe has tried to have the trustee removed because his work was being funded (as is normal practice) by some of the creditors.

Back in November 1998, in a letter responding to PCR's questions about how he planned to keep on funding the libel case, Condliffe wrote: "I have an equal interest in two properties with my brother." Now Condliffe claims to have never had any interest in the properties, Venleigh and the Riviera Lodge, both of which are in Cornwall and which would, of course, be considered assets in the bankruptcy if Condliffe were a part owner. He says he simply helps out his brother Christopher, who lives in Cheshire, with managing the properties. And he said he had lied in the letter in order to make PCR believe there were guaranteed funds to keep the case going. In the event, Condliffe's brother did mortgage one of the properties and "loaned" him £85,000 to pay part of the bill to PCR.

As well as questioning Condliffe about property ownership, Roger Kaye QC, representing Davenport Lyons, also queried the surprising number of companies Condliffe's wife Ann – who worked as a low-paid part-time typist and administrator in the Condliffe Hilton accountancy practice – is a director or partner in. There were also questions raised over Condliffe's mother's will which, when she recently died, left half her estate to her daughter-in-law Ann Condliffe rather than to her own son, thus protecting it from the creditors.

Asked how much he had spent on legal fees since the collapse of the case and his bankruptcy, Condliffe estimated £40,000. He said his wife was paying for counsel to appear with him in court for the examination. Indeed, Condliffe apparently has some very generous family and friends who have allowed him to feed his litigation habit.

"From about 1992 onwards, when *Private Eye* published the article, your family have supported you with an enormous amount of money in legal fees, firstly in the *Eye* case and secondly in trying to remove the trustee," noted Kaye. "Would it not have been a better use of those resources to have gone to the trustee and answered the questions?"

It was also suggested that some of these family and friends should be excluded from the list of creditors because they were essentially taking a punt on him winning the libel action rather than making any proper agreement to be paid back. Besides Christopher Condliffe's total contribution of around £140,000, Condliffe's mother (now deceased) had put up many thousands and a friend had loaned £145,000 on the assumption that he would be able to pay them all back from his court winnings, with no specific agreement as to the terms of the loans.

"You must have known there was a substantial risk," said Mr Kaye. "Were they expecting to be repaid at all if you didn't win?"

"We didn't contemplate that," said Condliffe.

The case in 2001 – described by Mr Justice Gray as "the most disproportionate litigation I have ever been involved with at the bar" – collapsed in the midst of questioning about why Condliffe's client files had been jumbled up and rearranged in incomprehensible chronological order rather than client order. Condliffe insisted the files had been handed to PCR in the correct format – PCR insisted that they had not.

Condliffe is determined to sue PCR for negligence in his case, saying he has documentary proof that the files were delivered in good order. He said that he didn't want PCR to know he had a 518-page document cross-referencing the files which he had lifted from PCR's offices, which he planned to use in his action against them. Condliffe and his lawyer Martha Mayer then tried to hide the existence of this document, opposing plans to append it to the transcript of the public examination.

District judge Thomas was having none of it: "This is a public hearing and members of the public are here in a sense represented. [Mr Condliffe] wants to be helpful – now it's out in the public domain."

The day concluded with Condliffe agreeing to provide the trustee with power of attorney to investigate his bank accounts and to provide further information on his financial affairs.

In a witness statement submitted before the hearing, Condliffe griped: "All of my problems stemmed from an article which *Private Eye* published."

There appears to be a little confusion between cause and effect here. Condliffe's problems stem, of course, from the moment he started fleecing his clients.

CHURCH NEWS

MORE TROUBLE for the self-proclaimed "expert in personal relationships" Dr Wesley Carr, dean of Westminster, whose record of messy sackings (organists, school headmasters, a clerk of works, volunteer guides, etc) has filled acres of newsprint and Eyes passim.

The latest bust-up has been more discreetly handled but is the most senior yet. Canon Michael Middleton, chapter member and treasurer, was widely regarded as Carr's man and famous for his filthy temper. (A couple of years ago out-of-hours callers to his office answering machine were surprised to hear a strangulated male voice shouting "Fuck! Fuck!" before an emollient female cut in with a more conventional greeting.)

Middleton has been on extended sick leave for months, suffering from stress. Whether this stress was the cause or effect of his final shouting match with Carr, during which he allegedly swore at the dean, is not clear. But last month a curt statement, with damningly faint regrets, announced that he is taking early retirement as a result of ill health. Onions all round at the abbey!

DOWN ON THE FARM

ANYONE who still thinks there is a vestige of sanity in the Department for the Elimination of Farming and Rural Affairs might consider the latest report from Defra's Veterinary Laboratory Agency (VLA) pronouncing that an epidemic of foot and mouth could sweep across Britain "once every 65 years".

Considering our last epidemic was only three years ago, this might seem consoling. If the next outbreak isn't due until 2066, we can sit back without too many worries. But we then recall that, prior to 2001, the previous major epidemic was in 1967, only 34 years before the 2001 outbreak, and we might begin to wonder why the confidence that history will not repeat itself.

Worse is to come, as we read on. Although the next epidemic isn't due until 2066, the probability of one breaking out has nevertheless "doubled since 2003" which, according to the VLA, represents "no rise in real terms".

The truth is that these people, punching away at their computers, haven't the foggiest when Britain might again be hit by FMD, any more than they yet have the faintest proof of why we were hit by the epidemic of Pan-Asian O FMD in 2001, or where it came from – except that two years earlier the European Commission had warned MAFF that the chances of an outbreak at any time were "highly likely". This was because this particular strain of the virus had in recent years been hurtling round the world, and had already caused significant damage in Albania and Macedonia in 1996, where the epidemic was only brought rapidly to a halt because the EU itself intervened with emergency mass-vaccination.

An even more startling fact which came to light during Defra's recent "simulation exercise" to test its contingency plans is that, despite the post-mortems since 2001, Defra has apparently learned nothing. The EU's new FMD directive makes clear that, if there is another outbreak anywhere in the EU, the first line of defence will be vaccination. There must be no repeat of the appalling mass-slaughter of healthy animals we saw in 2001.

But then along came Defra's "simulation", codenamed "Operation Hornbeam", supposedly reconstructing what will have happened by "days seven and eight" of another epidemic. The computers showed that there had already been 57 separate outbreaks, in four widely separated parts of the country: in other words an epidemic already raging out of control. Little Ben Bradshaw proudly announced that Defra had already slaughtered 17,400 animals, which made it all seem uncannily like a repeat of 2001. And only now, according to the Defra scenario, was Rosa Klebb (aka Margaret Beckett) telling the Commons that the government was considering a limited programme of vaccination, in just two of the four areas affected.

Not for nothing is the ministry known as "Defra and Blindra". Fortunately, however, the EU has also made it clear that next time Brussels will be in charge of operations from day one – so with luck Defra may not be given the chance to make quite such a monumental cock-up ever again.

'Muckspreader'

TV

Celebrity Place In The Sun (C4)
Would Like To Meet... Esther (BBC2)
Celebrity Mastermind (BBC1)

IT was the game of golf which first fell prey to the delusion that there is something inherently exciting in seeing famous people out of context. But the problem of pro-am celebrity golf tournaments, frequently televised in the 70s and 80s, was that they mainly made the case for watching people who know what they are doing. You wouldn't want to watch a pro-am variety show in which Nick Faldo and Seve Ballesteros tried to sing... so why the other way round?

Even so, a similar delusion exists in television, where formats which have flourished with civilians are suddenly judged to be improvable by an infusion of C-list stardom. Rather in the tradition of celebrities opening village fetes, there seems to be a feeling that a tacky event is somehow validated by the presence of a slightly famous face.

Unfortunately, because successful stars have their own shows to do, the definition of a famous person is notoriously stretched in such series and so, for example, the two subjects in the new run of **Celebrity Place In The Sun** are Tara Palmer-Tompkinson and Anthea Turner. The latter is only appearing on this show because she used to appear on other television programmes but the offers of work have dried up. Even more depressingly, TPT is someone whose only serious presence on TV has been in previous star spin-offs such as *I'm A Celebrity – Get Me Out Of Here*.

Tara's problem throughout her life has been disastrous judgement of men and jobs and someone really should have talked her out of this. Blithely innocent of the general public attitude to trust funds, TPT instructs *Place In The Sun* hostess Amanda Lamb to find her a weekend retreat on the Cote D'Azur for around £1.5m. Shown one property costing half a million more, she responds "budget schmudget". The contestants in *Big Brother 5* start to seem likeable in comparison.

Amanda's commentary – "Tara seems excited but a little confused", "Is Tara going to choose a house even madder than she is?" – hints at some of the difficulties in the filming. Though thrilled by a futuristic 60s home consisting of 30 interlocking domes like space capsules, the would-be buyer finally throws a strop when her speedboat arrives late at the heliport where she's catching the chopper to the plane. She rips off the microphone and the show fades out without a revelation about what Tara bought.

The hard view would be that, as reality television largely exists to give people the chance of appearing on TV, it's appropriate that the celebrity version should be used as a sort of methadone for former broadcasters who miss the buzz of the business. Even so, you start to wonder if even Anthea Turner deserves the humiliation of appearing on *A Place In The Sun* or if even Esther Rantzen should suffer the embarrassment of looking for another man on the spin-off edition **Would Like To Meet... Esther.**

Watching this, you wonder if these famed-up formats are intended by controllers as a threat to broadcasters about what could happen to them: something like the skull you used to get in the corner of portraits. Certainly, as Rantzen's clothes, looks and body-language are ripped apart by the resident experts, the possibility arises that the show is mainly intended as therapy for BBC staff who had a hard time on *That's Life*. Esther, though, proves cannier than Tara. By consenting to being seen vulnerable and even weeping, she eventually invites sympathy.

It's this slight possibility of redemption that keeps a steady supply of guests for these programmes. For every Les Dennis and Vanessa Feltz who come out damaged, there's a Phil Tufnell who achieves reinvention. Rantzen doesn't do that but at least avoids implosion.

But, if you want an example of taking a series which works perfectly with unknowns and wrecking it with the movie premiere set, then look at **Celebrity Mastermind**. Usually on BBC2, the format has been switched to BBC1 for a run of editions in which, for example, Bernard Cribbins answers questions on angling, Murray Walker is quizzed on Formula One and Tara Palmer Tompkinson – now isn't that not a surprise – sets her mind to considering the life and work of Audrey Hepburn.

The pleasure of *Mastermind* has always been the extreme seriousness of the proceedings: from the inquisitorial lighting to the nerdy obsessiveness of the guests. There's simply no point in playing the game for such low stakes.

'Remote Controller'

GOING LIVE

SKY subscribers certainly got their money's worth when Sky News went live to Tim Marshall inside a foreign workers' compound in Saudi Arabia.

"We have had to smuggle our equipment in and as you can see the streets here are empty, as they always are this time of year," said Marshall helpfully.

MEDIA NEWS

"I DON'T really understand this quality argument," says BBC1 controller Lorraine Heggessey, attempting to pre-empt the "independent" review of her channel's dismal output by BBC governors.

A glance at the newly announced £221m autumn schedule makes this abundantly clear: more Alan Titchmarsh, Rolf Harris and Michael Palin on the move. More reality TV: 200 fat people go on a diet; *What Not To Wear*; and more outings in "serious" drama productions for soap actors.

And what of news and current affairs? Heggessey is determined to keep *Panorama* in its Sunday night graveyard slot, describing any criticism of this decision as "uninformed bickering" – even if it comes from people within *Panorama*.

"If it were placed in the middle of the evening, ITV and other channels would schedule competitively against it," says Heggessey – surely not a problem for a public service broadcaster?

"THANKS A MILLION LONDON!" was the message on swifly-printed advertisments following publication of the first listening figures for Capital FM's new breakfast show host, Johnny Vaughan.

"Straight in at number one!... We've only been on the air three months and we're the NUMBER ONE breakfast show in London!"

Sadly, neither the adverts nor the show itself felt able to mention the fact that while Capital retains the largest audience share at breakfast, Vaughan has managed to jettison 187,000 listeners in the same period!

VIEWERS who felt the endless shots of fractured penises and impaled heads which graced Grub Smith's *101 Things...* series were perhaps Channel 4's greatest achievement yet, will be pleased to know the station's new season schedule, announced last week, promises even more treats.

My Breasts Are Too Big will "follow three women opting for breast reductions and feature their intimate journeys together with graphic footage of their operations." *Death By Silicone* will explore the "lethal price being paid for the body beautiful as illegal back-street cosmetic surgery has boomed", complete with "operations performed with cooking utensils, a male body builder being operated on strapped to a plank in an office suite, and a woman disfigured by repeatedly botched breast implants"

And just to ensure the men don't feel left out, *Boys With Breasts* will offer a sensitive investigation of "the secret world of gynaecomastia," interviewing "the man so at ease with his DD appendages that he is content to go out shopping for a bra."

DUMB BRITAIN

The Vault, ITV1

Gaby Logan: What is the county town of Kent?

Contestant: Don't know.

Brokers: Kentish Town?

Logan: What is the official language of China?

Contestant: Asian.

DUMB IRELAND

The Tim Kelly Show, Today FM, Dublin

Tim Kelly: What birthday does a bicentennial celebrate?

Contestant: Er...

Kelly: I'll give you a hint. Centennial is one hundred and bi means two.

Contestant: 102?

THE "independent" panel picked by culture secretary Tessa Jowell to review the BBC's charter contains several potential supporters of any plans to sell off parts of the BBC (Sly Bailey and Sir Alan Budd) or redistribute parts of the licence fee to the commercial sector (Tim Gardam).

A similar pattern is emerging on the BBC board of governors following the appointment of Anthony Salz as vice-chairman. Salz, from one of the City's biggest law firms, has made millions specialising in merger and privatisation cases, including the sale of BP. He knows nothing about broadcasting, so this appears to be the only skill he brings to the party.

Could plans already be forming to sell BBC Resources and BBC Worldwide? After all, negotiations to sell BBC Technology to Siemens continue and Salz's experience in the field would be invaluable. An early issue for Salz regarding a sale of BBC Technology, identified by BBC staff, would be how BBC managers could explain to licence-payers that if Siemens employees went on strike, taking BBC programmes off the air, the BBC would be unable to intervene in an external dispute. Screens would remain blank.

PS: The papers are full of accusations of cronyism following Anthony Salz's appointment.

Salz met his chum Gavyn Davies, Goldman Sachs economist and former BBC chairman, on the terraces at Southampton football club. He is also a trustee of the Eden project. The chairman of the trustees, Sir Ronald Hampel, openly admits that he appointed Salz because, er, both men have holiday homes in Cornwall.

Coincidentally, Richard Tait, another newly appointed BBC governor and former head of *Channel Four News,* and Michael Grade, BBC chairman and former chief executive of Channel Four, "both go away together on boys' own jaunts to Cornwall" (*Guardian*, 19 July).

A fellow Eden project trustee, Simon Robertson, is also president of Goldman Sachs Europe.

HATS off to London radio station LBC, which inadvertently found itself in the middle of not one but two of the biggest celebrity stories in town last month.

James Hewitt's girlfriend and alleged cocaine-supplier Alison Bell not only works for the station but met the cad supreme when he appeared on her show in April. And Rod Liddle's recently-promoted 23-year-old bit on the side, Alicia Monckton, has moved from her job as receptionist at the *Spectator* to a work experience placement at the station.

Not that listeners to London's top talk radio station were aware of any of this: Bell was referred to as "a TV and radio news presenter" throughout LBC's coverage of the incident, while the presence of Monckton on the premises during phone-ins on marital fidelity and mid-life crises was tactfully ignored!

BBC1 executives have come up with a better title for their latest Saturday night flop, *Passport to Paradise*, presented by Johnny Vaughan and Denise Van Outen.

Referring to Vaughan's past conviction for cocaine dealing, the show is referred to at TV Centre as "Denise and De Nose."

AD NAUSEAM

FACED with falling profits, the retailer Gap has hired the *Sex and the City* actress Sarah Jessica Parker as its latest mannequin, with press and TV work due to break late next month.

The new campaign features Parker customising Gap's humdrum staples with the strapline "How Do You Wear It?" Gary Muto, Gap's president, launched the campaign saying: "For 35 years, Gap has embraced individual style." He appears to have forgotten that Gap's last successful advertising, in the 1990s, showed models prancing about wearing exactly the same thing and was strapped with "Everybody in Khakis": hardly an expression of rampant individualism.

The new ads were created in the US by Laird+Partners and Gap has been keen to emphasise that Parker was chosen because "she is aspirational but not too out of reach or unattainable. She has appeal not just as an actress but as a real person, and she comes across as authentic."

And so to the "attainable" SJP look. Along with some ribbon and a hat, her main customisation is a large brooch designed by Fred Leighton, the Hollywood A-lister's jeweller *du jour*. For ladies wishing to emulate Ms Parker, the gems are yours for an extremely attainable $10m.

LAST week the Central Office of Information (COI) annual report revealed that the government's spend on advertising has increased to £189.5m, a rise of 19 percent.

This is taxpayers' money spent on so-called public information campaigns. Ad Nauseam has argued before that such films are never truly apolitical, because by their abundance they implicitly suggest the government is doing an awful lot of good work. Last week's £8.3m campaign to alert citizens to what to do in the event of a terrorist attack was a prime example: a brilliant piece of rabble-rousing and to hell with the facts.

If further proof were needed that the government uses advertising as furtive propaganda, the last time adspend rose so sharply was in 2000/1. In other words, the government's fondness for "public information" campaigns appears to increase in the run up to elections.

CRITICS IN CON-TEXT

PRESS adverts for Haitian musical *Vodou Nation*, currently touring the country, recall that the *Sunday Times* called it "A ravishing feelgood experience."

And indeed John Peter did use that phrase – complaining that the show was "almost incomprehensible", he wrote: "I had hoped for more than a ravishing feelgood experience."

The prize for context-stripping, however, goes to Simon Gray's *The Old Masters* at London's Comedy Theatre, which the *Daily Telegraph* apparently called "a sure-fire hit". Charles Spencer's phrase in full? "A few years ago, it would have been a sure-fire hit. These days, I'm not sure that such solid virtues are any longer box office."

ART NEWS

INSPECTOR Knacker took a large advert in the *Antiques Trade Gazette* last week about the theft of an oil-painting of a cavalry battle, titled "Circle of Palamedes called Stevents".

The picture, helpfully reproduced in the advert, had been stolen "from a private secluded country home overnight 17/18 June 2004", and anyone with information was urged to contact DC Mark Willock of Harrogate CID without delay.

A rather large clue could be found only a few pages further back in the same issue of the *Gazette*, where Criterion Riverside Auctions in London illustrated four of the paintings due to be sold at its art auction on 26 July, all with estimates at around £3,500. One was, er, the selfsame cavalry battle painting!

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Four in the morning is the new teatime." — *ES* magazine.

"Opera could well be the new cocaine." — *Irish Times*.

"Ice cream is the new Atkins." — BBC News online.

"Gulls are the new rats." — *Neighbours From Hell*, ITV.

"Gay marriage as 'the new abortion'." — *Washington Post*.

"Glasgow: the new Las Vegas." — *BBC Breakfast*.

"Newquay: the new Ibiza." — BBC Radio 1.

"Zakynthos: the new Xanadu." — *Sunday Times*.

"Oh look, Parker – pink is the new black this season!" — Lady Penelope in the *Thunderbirds* film.

"Naff is so the new cool." – The *Times*.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

DONATELLA VERSACE
IN COKE ADDICTION CLINIC:
DONATELLA, IF YOU CARRY ON, YOU'LL END UP WITH A DECAYED, HALF-SWOLLEN, HALF-COLLAPSED, WEIRD-LOOKING NOSE!
...IT'LL REALLY SUIT YOU!!!
GREAT!!!

DOING THE ROUNDS

A good death?

THE verdict of the House of Commons' health committee that 300,000 people each year are denied "a good death" each year is old news to the Voluntary Euthanasia Society. The Scottish wing, EXIT, has for some time been running workshops on "self-deliverance", which include "the latest *how to* methods for dying safely".

A common misconception for those who wish to end it all is that a single pill will do it quickly and humanely. The human body is generally quite resilient to death. Harold Shipman, whose actions have done incalculable harm to palliative care and the voluntary euthanasia movement, had to use large doses of injected opiates. Similarly, Swiss clinics run by organisations such as Dignitas use large doses of barbiturates.

For those unwilling or unable to fly to Switzerland, EXIT workshops favour a dignified DIY death through slow asphyxiation (cutting off oxygen from the brain). Methods advocated in their July newsletter ("no substitute for attending a workshop") include the use of a ratchet ("available from hardware shops and superstores such as B&Q") to compress the carotid arteries rather than the windpipe ("painful") or just the jugular veins (which leave your face "congested and purple").

The newsletter contains practical advice many readers might ordinarily find grisly in the extreme. But the fact that there is a need for such advice, or workshops, is just a sad reflection on our treatment of the irreversibly and terminally sick.

Very few people wish to be seen losing control of their bowels in front of the family when their mind's gone to putty, and yet thousands suffer degrading and prolonged deaths each year. And those who engage in mercy killings, such as 100 year old Bernard Heginbotham, still get hauled through the courts.

For all "new" Labour's guff about extending patient choice, the one area where it truly matters — when, where and how you die — is still a huge political taboo that is pushed to the back of the queue. Fifty five percent of deaths still occur in hospital, when most people express the wish to be at home; and palliative care provision is alarmingly unequal. For example, North Yorkshire gets 20,500 hours of Marie Curie nursing a year but West Yorkshire — four times the size — gets only 11,000. And after Shipman, we'll need to double the non-existent nurses to go through all the drug safety checks.

No wonder people are reaching for the ratchet.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

SIGNAL FAILURES

London calling

A KEY feature of the government's rail review is to devolve control over local services. So why has transport secretary Alistair Darling junked plans for new tram lines in Manchester and Portsmouth, vigorously promoted by local authorities?

Darling's excuse was that the costs had risen too far. What he forgot to say was that the costs ballooned because of interference from London (*Eye* 1103). The government's insistence on unwieldy private finance initiative (PFI) contracts and on vetting all tram proposals in minute detail, mean that for the first time in 15 years no new tram route is being built in Britain.

The unwritten message of Darling's devolution plan is that in the world's fourth largest economy, during a period of prosperity, decent local railways serving Britain's major cities are unaffordable. He said the regional transport authorities would have "more flexibility to make choices between rail and other forms of transport" – ie buses. That "flexibility" could soon become a straightjacket: central government controls the subsidy the authorities hand to train operators and it needs to find savings to balance the inflated cost of keeping the privatised railway in business.

To politicians and bureaucrats in London, regional trains look ripe for cuts because subsidy per passenger is often high. But subsidy is high because of the privatisation devised and perpetuated by... the politicians and bureaucrats in London (*Eye* 1101). The subsidy needed to retain south Yorkshire's local services leapt when they were privatised from £4m in 1995 to £19m in 1996. Rather than tackling the root cause of that inflation, Darling has opted to leave the rip-off rolling-stock companies and pointless franchising system intact.

Darling's announcements have gone down particularly badly in Manchester, a city plagued by pisspoor buses run (or not run) by FirstGroup. Many of the city's suburban stations are poorly used because the trains go to the edge of the city centre and can be infrequent. Meanwhile the sleek and frequent Manchester Metrolink trams, which stop in city-centre streets, are bursting at the seams.

For years the regional authority has wanted to convert the decrepit rail line to Oldham and Rochdale into a Metrolink line and take trams into the city's south and east. Around £200m has already been spent, mostly on jumping through government hoops and buying buildings that stood in the way of new tracks. Tony Blair has been praising the expansion scheme since 1999 but now would rather see Manchester stagnate than address the real reasons for Metrolink's cost increase.

DESPITE its looming abolition the "strategic" rail authority (SRA) is still putting a gloss on its announcements. Presenting its annual report, the SRA said one of its key achievements was cutting the cost of the west-coast mainline renewal scheme from £13.5bn to £7.6bn "with no material loss of outputs".

That £13.5bn was the estimated cost in 2002 of completing the upgrade project hatched in the late 1990s by Virgin and Railtrack (planned cost: £2bn). This promised 140mph services; a new generation of signals to make room for more trains; and extra tracks at bottlenecks. The revised scheme is due to start this September – with trains no faster than 125mph and in many cases stuck at 110mph (the line's top speed since the 1980s).

The high-tech signals and extra tracks haven't materialised, so Virgin won't run as many trains as it promised. And to make room for Virgin, other train operators have (or will) cut services and won't be allowed to run extra trains to meet rising demand – none of which was featured in the original project.

The SRA's misleading statement can't be down to ignorance because one of the people behind the original plans was Richard Bowker, then Virgin Rail's co-chairman. As chairman *and* chief executive of the SRA, he must know how much has been hacked from the project so the bill is only 3.5 times the original quote.

Another "material loss" is about £390m from the train-subsidy pot last year alone, when Virgin West Coast was meant to pay a franchise premium of about £60m but received a subsidy of £332m. Now why didn't the SRA mention that?

PS: A strong bladder is the latest requirement for Virgin passengers, to add to short legs, a huge bank balance and endless patience. Toilets on the new Pendolino trains are often out of use because the tanks storing the effluent are full.

Some of the train depots can't empty the tanks yet, and the problem is exacerbated by the paucity of toilets within each train – about half as many as on the trains they're replacing. Even kitchen staff aren't allowed a separate toilet, which BR used to provide for good hygiene.

'Dr B. Ching'

THE COMMUTERS
HELLO! I'M NEARLY HOME COULD YOU COME AND PICK ME UP?
I'LL BE IN THE USUAL PLACE...
THANKS! WE'VE BEEN STUCK IN THE SIDINGS FOR AGES...
scramble
STOP

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

TAXI RANK

LEICESTER SOUTH by-election victor Parmjit Singh Gill came to local political prominence in 1998 when he staged a coup against two councillors in the Stoneygate ward.

In those days the former taxi driver was a member of the Labour party. Jim Marshall, the late Leicester South MP, and former council leader Peter Soulsby complained to the regional Labour party, pointing out that Gill's victory in the selection contest had been entirely dependent on a sudden influx of Sikh taxi drivers to the local branch.

The meeting was run again, with only members of more than six months' standing entitled to vote, and the sitting councillors were reselected. Gill left Labour in a huff and joined the Lib Dems. At the next council elections Gill was again a candidate in Stoneygate, backed once more by the massed ranks of Sikh taxi drivers who had also left Labour for the Lib Dems.

His first year on the council was marked by his reluctance to speak at council meetings. But he did speak out in private when the council proposed to axe £2m from voluntary groups. Thanks to his intervention, the council spared the Sikh Community Centre.

After Gill's selection as Lib Dem by-election candidate, only one thing stood in his way. His uncle, taxi drivers' leader Sital Singh Gill, had been selected as candidate for Socialist Labour and there was a danger of a split in the taxi drivers' votes. But then Sital stood down, announcing that he would be looking after sick relatives in India on election day. Gill duly romped to victory with the city's taxi drivers united behind him. Prominent among his supporters at the count was Uncle Sital, whose relatives had evidently made a happy recovery.

DUTY CALLSH

WHO SAYS councillors don't work hard? Edinburgh city councillor Eric Milligan takes his role as chairman of Lothian and Borders police board seriously. Thus he felt duty bound to accept when Strathclyde police invited him and fellow Labour councillor Brian Fallon to visit the Ibrox football ground in Glasgow, where Rangers were at home to Hearts last May, to study how the match was policed.

The two Hearts fans, who were driven on their 100-mile round trip in a police vehicle, took their fact-finding role so seriously they stayed on at Ibrox for an hour after the match, which Hearts won, to inspect the hospitality on offer. After being driven back to Edinburgh they spent another three hours in a pub comparing notes, before being driven home at 1am. Their civilian police driver, who was three hours over his shift, was no doubt glad of the overtime.

The councillors' selfless devotion to duty would not have emerged had not some churlish soul complained to Scotland's justice minister Cathy Jamieson about an alleged "waste of resources". Jamieson has asked for an investigation by Lothian and Borders police board (chairman: Cllr E. Milligan).

● **AFTER spending seven months preparing a spiteful legal case against housing campaigner Alan Walter (*Eye* 1111), Labour-run Camden council dropped it three days before it was due to go to court. Walter, prominent in the Defend Council Housing (DCH) pressure group, was in the council's black books because of DCH's successful campaign last year to get tenants to vote No to the council's proposal to put its housing stock in an arm's length management organisation (Almo), a sort of back-door privatisation. It was particularly galling for Camden's "new" Labour councillors, who wasted £500,000 on pro-Almo propaganda, to have been defeated by a group of tenants with no resources other than good arguments and democratic support. Walter was being prosecuted for putting up an anti-Almo poster in a bus shelter and faced a fine and costs totalling £1,460. The council's executive, led by "Dame" Jane Roberts, was all for pressing ahead – despite legal advice that it might well lose – until backbenchers came to their senses and voted to drop the whole embarrassing matter at the eleventh hour.**

UP KIT CREEK

IS THE pressure of office beginning to tell on Tory Westminster council's deputy leader Kit Malthouse?

In May he labelled those not happy with Westminster's decision to allow Dame Shirley Porter to pay only £12m of the £43m surcharge she owed for having gerrymandered Westminster council in the 1980s as "bloody obsessives". Now Malthouse has told a free local newspaper, *West End Extra*, that Gordon Brown "hates local government and particularly hates us".

Malthouse's rant at the chancellor came in response to news that after years of apparently balancing the books, Westminster council's finances are in a right old mess, with a £100m deficit in the pension fund. As a result of the financial black hole cuts in front-line services of more than £16m have been agreed. And, exquisitely embarrassing for Westminster's Tories, they have had to beg the hated Brown for an emergency £30m to help bridge the gap.

Whether Malthouse's ravings will make the chancellor more or less likely to put his hand in his pocket remains to be seen. Certainly the treasury knows that, by an amazing coincidence, £30m is almost exactly the sum Westminster let Dame Shirley off from paying earlier this year.

MIS-SPENT LOUTH

LAST WEEK the press was full of the horrific details of how 15-year-old schoolboy Alan Pennell stabbed to death 14-year-old fellow pupil Luke Walmsley in a corridor at Birkbeck College in the village of North Somercotes, near Louth, Lincolnshire, last November.

But Pennell is not the only teenager with problems in Louth, where dozens of youths are addicted to gambling, some spending up to £150 in an afternoon in the arcades. The money to pay for this comes from petty crime, which has become a big problem in a small town.

Youth workers complain there is nowhere locally young people can go to help address their gambling problems. A drop-in centre for teenagers closed because of lack of funding, even though police had pleaded with East Lindsey district council to find the money to keep it open. Outside funding has been found for a skateboard park, but the council still hasn't earmarked land for the site.

Money shouldn't be a problem for projects such as these. After flogging off its housing stock, East Lindsey has £42m in the bank, earning it £1.5m a year in interest. The "Independent" council boasts that it uses this to hold down council tax, something dear to the hearts of the elected members. Also dear to them are their allowances. Earlier this year, days after the audit commission branded the council "weak", members responded... by awarding themselves an 11 percent rise!

● **MILTON KEYNES council, at the centre of a police investigation into allegations of corruption in the taxi licensing department and links to organised crime (*Eyes passim*), has responded to the freedom of information act, which comes into effect on 1 January, by urging staff to destroy hundreds of files. A memo to staff at the Lib Dem council says: "Potentially everything in all your files (even the archived ones) will need to be made available to anyone who wants to see it. It will be a criminal offence for you to destroy it once a request has been made. What's more, you will have only 20 working days to release the information." Staff are therefore urged to "act now" by binning "information that is old and no longer needed". One hopes Inspector Knacker is not disappointed.**

Licensed for Civil marriage ceremonies
Wedding Receptions

Also available for
Naming ceremonies
Renewal of vowels

Advertisement for Priory Centre, St Neots

IN THE PIPELINE

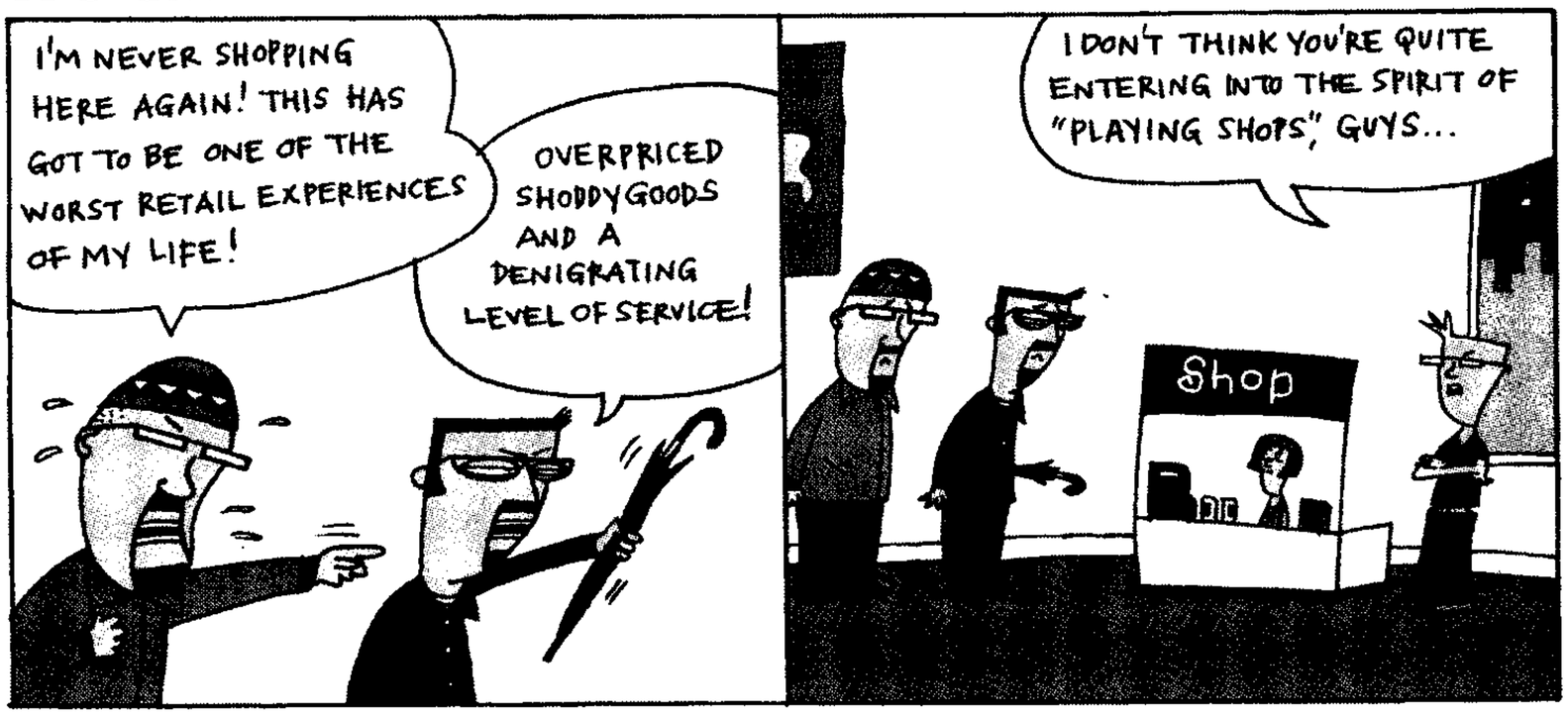
THE Georgian government has called a halt to the construction of the controversial Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan pipeline (*Eyes passim*), fuming over the failure of BP and its partners to get the appropriate construction permits before starting work in the Borjomi national park.

Georgian environment minister Tamar Lebanidze's department sent BP a formal reminder that it still needed to apply for construction permits in early July. No application was made, but later in the month staff from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) photographed work illegally going ahead on construction. Now BP has been ordered to stop work on the section and is complying, while the government demands stricter safety measures and additional safety guarantees.

A 17km stretch of the pipeline will run through the Borjomi Valley, famous for its outstanding beauty and mineral water springs. The area is also vulnerable to landslides and earthquakes and residents and green groups have opposed the route because of the potential environmental catastrophe that would result from either sabotage or natural disaster rupturing the pipe. But BP expects the suspension of work to be short-lived as it sets its lawyers on the case.

PS: The UK's export credit guarantee department responded urgently to the *Eye*'s last piece on human rights and environmental issues along the pipeline – to say we had, er, described the nature of export credits incorrectly. It's a fair enough point. However their letter had not one word of response to the issues themselves.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


I'M NEVER SHOPPING HERE AGAIN! THIS HAS GOT TO BE ONE OF THE WORST RETAIL EXPERIENCES OF MY LIFE!
OVERPRICED SHODDY GOODS AND A DENIGRATING LEVEL OF SERVICE!
I DON'T THINK YOU'RE QUITE ENTERING INTO THE SPIRIT OF "PLAYING SHOPS", GUYS...
Shop

NOOKS and CORNERS

IT IS hard not to feel some satisfaction that Liverpool council now agrees with me and has cancelled the gratuitous "Fourth Grace" proposed for Pierhead (*Eye* 1069).

The ostensible reason is that the estimated cost has already risen from £228m to £324m; but it may also have dawned on the council that this pretentious scrunched-up "Cloud" or blob-on-stilts would have been as pointless as it was blunderingly inappropriate. Perhaps the "Bilbao Effect" — the cult of celebrity architecture, of the iconic superstar landmark building — is at long last beginning to wane.

The architect of the tautological Fourth Grace, Will Allsop, claims he only learned of its cancellation in a press release and that this is "really shabby behaviour" and "downright rude"; but as he is as notorious for bad manners to people as he is for boorishly arrogant designs, this is a case of pots and black kettles.

Liverpool might now ponder that being European City of Culture in 2008 could involve caring about *local* culture and buildings. A start could be made with the former Lyceum Club in Bold Street, to whose current condition Florence Gersten of the Save Our City Campaign draws my attention. Elderly readers will recall that this superb neo-classical library designed by Thomas Harrison in 1800 was to be demolished for a commercial redevelopment until, after much public protest, the department of the environment intervened and, in 1984, negotiated for it to be restored as a Post Office.

So far, so good. But now the Post Office or Consignia or the Royal Mail or whatever the organisation now calls itself, has decided to close one of the three city centre branches. And, inevitably, as fine, dignified civic architecture gets in the way of making all post offices look like tawdry corner shops, the Lyceum has been chosen for the chop.

Of course the Lyceum will not now be demolished (I assume); but the former News Room accommodating the Post Office will probably be converted into another bar-cum-restaurant, like the adjoining Reading Room. As, all over Britain, every former bank and insurance company office seems to have been made into a drinking den (and the government wonders why we have a problem), this might seem unfortunate.

The Save Our City Campaign (which emerged from the Lyceum controversy) says that when the building was first saved, it was suggested that it would have made a fine addition to Liverpool's museums and galleries. It still could: Liverpool Central Library needs more space and a fraction of that £228m to have been squandered on Allsop's folly could make the Lyceum a place where local collections can be seen.

Many who care about Liverpool were apprehensive that the City of Culture award could be counter-productive as such accolades tend to encourage local authorities to pursue their more ill-considered and damaging projects. Evidence, so far, confirms this. The Save Our City Campaign is objecting to the proposed demolition of 75 Duke Street, a Georgian house in one of the city's oldest and most interesting streets. The building — like far too much of Georgian Liverpool — is neglected and in poor condition, and the owners, Messrs Frenson, propose to demolish it "pending submission of redevelopment proposals".

Duke Street is in the so-called Ropeworks Quarter (close to the Lyceum), which is being transformed by the conversion of existing buildings into flats and the building of new apartment blocks. To quote Mrs Gersten: "There is already considerable public disquiet about the number of buildings which have been demolished in the Ropewalks area. To lose this one would be an outrage." A "City of Culture" ought to know better.

I'M happy to report that after a public inquiry, the appeal by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God against refusal of planning permission to convert the former EMD Cinema in Walthamstow into a church has been turned down.

This is one of the really good cinemas. Formerly the Granada in Hoe Street, it was designed by Cecil Masey with an interior by Theodore Komisarjevsky (of Granada Tooting fame) and opened in 1930. In 2000, the Odeon

chain sold it to EMD Cinemas but with a vexatious restrictive covenant preventing the screening of English language films. Nevertheless Indian and other films could be shown; and the McGuffin Film Society was founded to restore the building and make it a local centre for cinema. Then, in 2003, the building was sold to the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God for £2.8m and, the day after the building was "blessed", an illegal rave party in it resulted in the interior being vandalised.

Now that this wretched cult cannot change the building's use, it must be hoped that this splendid edifice can be transferred to a cinema operator. It is listed grade II*, but appears on English Heritage's Buildings at Risk Register. Waltham Forest council has agreed to compulsorily purchase the cinema if the UCKG declines to sell, so there is still hope.

'Piloti'

I-SPY *Selly Oak, Birmingham*

Submitted by Ben Andrews. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

WHEN the much-loved William Lyne retired from the Wigmore Hall after running the place for decades, he was a hard act to follow. So it was predictable that his successor, the comparatively young Paul Kildea, would new-broom with a vengeance.

But the vigour with which Kildea (or Dr Kildea as he likes to be known) has been turning the Hall upside down is causing havoc and dismay. Celebrated artists who have been appearing there for years are now looking elsewhere to perform; concert agents are discussing what could easily become rebellion; and members of the Wigmore's board of trustees are letting it be known that they'd like to reconsider Kildea's appointment.

The problem is that Kildea is not only very ambitious; he's also arrogant and aloof and regards himself an omni-competent polymath. Back in Australia, where he was born, he had a modest career as a conductor and academic before re-inventing himself in Britain as an arts administrator.

When he got the Wigmore job, which at the very least is full-time, it was assumed he would devote himself to admin. Not so. Kildea has been blatantly using the Wigmore as a platform for his own advancement as a lecturer/conductor/all-round music personality. As one leading concert agent says: "It wouldn't be so bad if he had some talent for any of these things, but he hasn't. That he takes every opportunity to programme himself as a conductor is embarrassing."

One glaring example of Kildea's self-promotion is that he has had the gall to advertise himself as a replacement for the eminent conductor Paul Daniel, who had been booked for a Wigmore Mahler series in the autumn but now appears mysteriously to be un-booked.

Such tactics are not winning many friends. Nor is the fact that he has told several popular artists identified with the Lyne regime that their time at the Hall is over. He has told others that, if they are to remain, their repertory choices will be subject to his dictatorial interference. Big names like Barbara Bonney and Steven Isserlis have taken serious affront and begun to look at other venues. Long-standing financial supporters like Ralph Kohn and Jackie Rosenfeld are backing off. And the only people coming through the door are a cohort of suspiciously attractive young men whom Kildea has, for whatever reason, decided to champion.

A photograph of one of them, an unknown pianist with a winning smile called Cedric Tiberghian, appears prominently on page 7 of the grandiose new Wigmore guide. And on page 8. And on page 9 as well. He must be very talented.

Aware that things are getting out of hand, the chairman of the Wigmore board Sir John Tusa recently took the extreme step of ringing round various artists, agents and donors to promise that Kildea would be "reined in" and "better behaved in future". But as one of them replied: "It will take more than promises to avert what's turning into a disaster there. If someone doesn't act fast, I can see everything Bill Lyne did through all those years to make the Wigmore a success just falling apart."

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS BY BIRCH

Loads about the Sickert show in Kendal, all dragging up the theory that he was Jack the Ripper...
That's utterly crazy!
WALTER SICKERT'S HEART OF DARKNESS
REVIEW
LAKE DISTRICT SHOW NOT ALL DAFFODILS
Who's going to go all the way up to Kendal ??!!
Exactly—it should have been at the Whitechapel.

Letters

Paul Foot remembered

Sir,

I should like you to know how grateful I and my brother are for all the support Paul gave us through his articles and his speaking at meetings, particularly at the annual benefits organised by the campaign for my freedom.

We know he had carried on with his vigorous support for imprisoned people like me despite his continuing illness, yet it was a real shock and with a sense of loss that I learnt of his death.

Please accept our commiserations. I have such sad thoughts that Paul will not be there to greet me and for me to greet him when I finally get to England.

With all our gratitude,
MORDECHAI VANUNU and
MEIR VANUNU,

Jerusalem.

Sir,

You say (Eye 1111, page 4) that Paul Foot had remarkably few enemies. Let me register as first of the few.

My last crack at this man was published in the Oldie in February this year. I said that Foot argued in his review of Ricky Tomlinson's shameless autobiography that the latter's 1973 trial and conviction were "disgraceful", that the charges were "trumped up" and that the sentence of two years' imprisonment was "savage". As a barrister practising at the time I pointed out that none of this was true. It was the use of flying pickets by building workers, and later by miners, that was disgraceful. It involved the criminal use of coercive force on a large scale, and was rightly banned by Thatcherite legislation (not overturned in the years of subsequent Labour rule).

Foot's virulent desire, from an early age, to inflict maximum harm on values which I and many others hold dear caused more hurt than would anything I say, or might say, in very bad taste now when he is no longer with us.

Yours faithfully,
FRANCIS BENNION,

Via email.

Sir,

The current issue of your organ contains an entire page devoted to a single public figure, wherein you sing his praises and say nothing either rude or satirical about him.

This is unprecedented, is it not? Do you intend to make a habit of it? I think bells should be tolled...

True, the gentleman in question worked for you, and contributed mightily to the public weal. But little things like that, and being dead, don't normally stop the Eye from going for the jugular.

Standards is standards. Paul would have been appalled, no?

But damn, I miss him too. Never mind the Trot bollocks. Who now will probe and lacerate the Nyoo-Lay-Bore swindles and swizzes as he did?

Good mourning,
AIDAN FOSTER-CARTER,

Via email.

● There will be a special issue of the Eye in September celebrating Paul Foot's life and work. We would welcome recollections or observations from readers, old colleagues, whistleblowers and anyone who was helped by his exposés and campaigns. Please send them to Hilary Lowinger at the Private Eye office or to hilary.lowinger@private-eye.co.uk

Science lesson

Sir,

Boffin's article on science funding (last Eye, p. 9) is bleak. Particularly bleak as it neglects the (unpublicised) successes of programmes such as Surrey University's satellite programme, which has worked on over 20 satellites and is also profitable.

However, science education is caught in a vicious cycle. Only 32 percent of state school physics teachers have a physics degree (compared with 80 percent in private schools). It must be harder for teachers to inspire children to carry on with a subject if they did not even choose it as their degree.

MATTHEW WOOLGAR,

Walton-on-Thames, Surrey.

Lookalike

Great White Cherie

Great White Shark

Sir,

The two pictures above appeared in the Times on 13 July. I wonder if by any chance, etc.

Yours faithfully,
W.J. POPE,

Nottingham.

The link effect

Sir,

In belittling Prof Ironside's letter, Muckspreader (Eye 1111) has got hold of the wrong end of the stick – again. He is confusing a causal link with the initial forecasts. Science has demonstrated the causal link ***[between BSE and CJD]*** *but the claims of death tolls to which Muckspreader clings were prognoses made at an early stage and were widely spread in value. While the current slowdown of cases is welcome we must wait to see whether the incubation periods vary in different human groupings – we still do not know how prevalent the disease will be. We should hope for the best but prepare for the worst. Muckspreader could well have learned this for himself, had he read the science.*

PETER HOOPER,

Via email.

A doctor writes

Sir,

I reply to Wendy Wiltshire ("Doctor Evil", Letters 1111). It was certainly not my intention to trivialise the pain caused by suicide of a loved one. Five of my medical school year and a similar number of my patients have killed themselves despite all that could be done to help them.

I apologise for any distress caused but stand by my assertion that people bereaved by suicide should not be encouraged by lawyers and journalists to seek scapegoats, as is clearly the case with Roaccutane.

The bereaved will not be helped by falsehoods and others will be harmed.

Yours sincerely,
DR STEPHEN HAYES,

Via email.

Scenes You Seldom See

Dumb quiz

Sir,

Re your "Dumb Britain" feature: a few years ago, I auditioned for the show "Fifteen To One". The audition involved a mock game very similar to the actual TV show. Before we started, we were told always to have a guess at the answer even if we didn't know it. I got more questions correct than almost anybody else, but replied "Don't know" to questions where I had absolutely no idea. I was not invited to appear. It is clear to me that this policy of demanding that contestants always make a guess (no matter how idiotic) must be widespread. Presumably, the idea is that the viewers will be provided additional "entertainment" by hearing daft answers, and will also be made to feel superior, and send in examples to Private Eye.

Otherwise, keep up the good work.

Best Regards,
DARREN BURNS,

Manchester.

Truth about the BNP

Sir,

The usually perspicacious Remote Controller has his facts sadly wrong in Eye 1111. S/he seems to imagine that political truths need be established just the once for them to be agreed, understood, and universally implemented for all time, down through the generations.

Not so. "For evil to triumph it is enough for good people to do nothing" – so said St Jerome, not to mention numerous paraphrasers over the years.

Remote Controller questions whether there is a single person who does not understand the true nature of the BNP. Yes, you smug, complacent, ivory-towered refugee from reality, there are tens of thousands whose political analysis is about as deep and as long-lasting as that of the average goldfish, and who were taken in by droves during recent election campaigns.

Smart young men (and they do seem to be universally men) in smart slick suits promising fair deals for everyone in deprived and run-down areas of our northern cities are bound to strike chords with those too young or too thick to recall the 70s and 80s.

Without doubt, if "Secret Agent" had been transmitted before the recent elections (obviously not permissible under electoral law) there would now not be a dozen or more BNP councillors in the aforesaid northern towns.

If the programme did nothing else, at least it stirred Knacker into action, with charges now being considered against half a dozen of the individuals featured. Otherwise – keep up the good work.

BRYN GLOVER,

Cracoe, N. Yorks.

LUVVIES

I'm in the process of working on a book. It's basically gonna describe the resilience of the human spirit – that's the overall core of it. And I'm also attracted to the depths of acting and how it can portray one's life in the sense of one who has lived, or one's life in the sense of the human story. That, I think, I would be very good at.

ALICIA KEYS
The Times

Submitted by Daniel Robinson

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Lookalike

Her Majesty

Giles's Grandma

Sir,

Do all grandmas take on the archetypal Queenie look?

Yours sincerely,
ERIC GADD,

Lostwithiel, Cornwall.

Dimmock view

Sir,

May I congratulate Piloti on his piece about Ely cathedral and the Lady Chapel's striking item of statuary which, as he correctly reports, has been blessed with the title of "Charlie Dimmock" by the congregation?

But please, don't campaign for her removal to obscurity. It's terribly depressing to visit the Lady Chapel (particularly in mid-winter when it's colder in there than Charity) and observe the vandalism wrought by the reformation. Were one of a lugubrious disposition, dark thoughts might enter the mind, until turning, spontaneous laughter is the almost inevitable reaction when the bounteous image of Charlie is beheld. Many say that the obvious response to her apparent attempt to dive into the body of the hall (I dispute the suggestion that she is struggling with an invisible marrow) would be to place the christening font in her path: for some reason the dean and chapter remain as yet unmoved by this proposal.

Admittedly, she looks about as much at home as a turd in bowl of custard, but with time I've grown to find her presence reassuring and a ray of light on a grey day. Then again, I do see her as something of statement of modern tastes and values when she's contrasted with the beauty of the rest of the chapel.

By the way, did Piloti's spies point out the secret mermaid amongst the stonemason's carvings? She may be small but she raises a smile too.

Yours sincerely,
MIKE BANAHAN,

Via email.

Shameless plug

Sir,

My surprise at seeing an unattributed photograph of our choir trip to Ely Cathedral (Piloti, issue 1111) was so great that I considered taking out a subscription to the Eye in order that I might cancel it at the earliest possible opportunity. However it seems much more in keeping with current Anglican practice to try for a shameless plug of our excellent CD of music for Advent and Christmas ("From Darkness into Light"), which is available from www.townchurch.org.gg at the sinfully low price of £10 (statue not included).

Cheers now,
JAMES HENDERSON,

Choirmaster, St Peter Port Parish Church, Guernsey.

Tony's flair

Sir,

I read with interest, in the Press & Journal of 26 July, a quote from Clarissa Dickson Wright in which she stated that in her previous employment as a barrister she knew Tony Blair. She went on to say that at that time, at the Inns of Court, his nickname was "Miranda" but she declined to state the basis on which the nickname was earned.

Can you enlighten your readers? I think we should be told!

COLIN CAMPBELL,

Via email.

Head start

Sir,

Your correspondent's Letter From Kiev (Eye 1111) reported, inter alia, the 2000 case of the decapitated journalist Grigory Gongadze. A few sentences below it was suggested that this case may have "just raised its ugly head again". Might I recommend that in future your journos check their thesauruses for alternative phrasings to avoid this rather unfortunate clash of terminology?

Yours ever,
J.W. BYROM (DR),

Kettleshulme, Cheshire.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"... they're all looking backwards over each other's shoulder."
MIKE SMITH, Eurosport
(Roy Spark)

"... so we kick off the third semi-final."
BILL LESLIE, Sky Sports (referring to quarter-final of the Copa America)
(Lewys Ball)

"The truth is – we need ships on the ground."
MIKE CRITCHLEY, Sky News
(Graham Whyte)

"Armstrong is about to join a list which includes only himself."
MARK BROWN, ESPN
(Jim Hatch)

"Nicholas Jalabert does not have quite the same pedigree as his brother Jalabert."
MIKE SMITH, Eurosport
(Roger Peck)

Bloomsday bloomer

Sir,

Thanks for publishing my letter correcting your Bloomsday pictorial Bloomers, last Eye. I notice another reader from Belfast has written to correct what he sees as a mistake in my letter, that I was wrong in saying your photo was of "The Cairo gang".

As proof that we Irish can meet and match our neighbours in political nerdyness, I must defend myself by pointing you at this web address where you will see your photograph unambiguously marked as one of the "The Cairo Gang" – http://michaelcollins.warnerbros.com/cmp/a6.html

In fact there are no end of website references to this group using this photo and pointing to the fact that it is numbered as evidence of how Collins had identified all of them and their locations in quiet boarding houses and hotels across Dublin. That was how his team of 12 managed to kill all 19 of them in a matter of minutes.

Your contributor proposes that the Cairo gang were unlikely to be photographed, but these were a group of men who feared no enemies, having recently completed a successful mission in the far more alien colony of Egypt, hence the name "the Cairo Gang" which was a term of respect by the British side rather than an insult from the Irish side. This photo was for their own private record and it was a mark of how thoroughly Collins penetrated Crown Forces in Dublin that he managed to get this photo. It was the Irish War's equivalent of cracking the Enigma code.

Your contributor instead proposes that it is a group of RIC men up from the country to compare notes. No doubt such groups existed, but such a group certainly would not have been photographed together given the extreme hostility, which had developed, to RIC intelligence officers, outside Dublin.

There are a number of books available on the Irish War of Independence and civil war, which usually lists this photo as one of the Cairo Gang, as did our school history books in Ireland. Understandably its a sideshow to British history for most British people but worth a read for anyone interested in history given it describes a period of all out war in a British capital city in the 1920s, making America's prohibition look like "Bugsy Malone", followed by an exceptionally pointless and self-destructive Civil War.

DES HICKEY,

Surbiton, Surrey.

Peace studies

Sir,

Your story about dispersal under the anti-social behaviour act 2003 reminded me of the riot act, but there are differences.

The riot act 1715 applied to "persons unlawfully, riotously, and tumultously assembled together, to the disturbance of the publick peace". There had to be at least 12. They could be required to disperse within one hour.

The new act would seem to apply to people who are lawfully and peacefully in the same place and minding their own business. Two will do. And they must disperse immediately.

Er, that's it.

JOHN MORRIS,

Leatherhead, Surrey.

Lodging a complaint

Sir,

Perusing the yearbook of the Grand Lodge of Antient Free and Accepted Masons of Scotland, I find on page 146 that Ian Hislop is listed as a member of the Glasgow Kilwinning Lodge. Have the Masons discovered humour, or has a certain editor lost the plot?

Regards,
TOM MINOGUE,

Dunfermline, Fife.

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

MY DOG'S VERY WILY WHEN IT COMES TO HUNTING..
.. HE KNOWS HOW TO MAKE HIMSELF INVISIBLE.
COME ON BOY! WILD BOAR!
I'LL JUST HIDE HERE UNTIL HE GOES AWAY.

Letter from **Malabo**

from Our Own Correspondent

NEVER mind Smelly, Scratcher and the assorted toffs and spivs your newspapers say took such a fancy to Equatorial Guinea that they planned a coup here last March. We're used to being told that people want to topple our leader.

Last year state radio announced that Teodoro Obiang Nguema could "kill without anyone calling him to account and without going to hell because it is God himself, with whom he is in permanent contact, who gives him this strength". But such omnipotence has not put off the plotters, real and imagined, that Armengol Ondo, Obiang's brother and secret service chief, turns ups every year – and uses to justify the permanent state of terror under which we labour.

What they all want is a slice of our extraordinary new wealth. And so do we. According to the World Bank, since we discovered oil 10 years ago we've gone from being the poorest country in Africa to one of the richest, with average annual earnings now at £3,796.42. Strange, then, that so many of us still live in such poverty. But at least we now have an idea where some of the money has gone.

Last month the US senate published its report into how Riggs Bank in Washington has been helping our leader and his family to help themselves. Riggs was kind enough to open 60 accounts for Obiang, his wife, his sons and assorted other relatives, help them establish shell offshore companies – and accept huge cash deposits, no questions asked.

On a couple of occasions our leaders' flunkeys dropped off $3m in cash, in shrink-wrapped bundles in suitcases weighing in at 60lbs. Altogether, Riggs accepted $13m in cash in just two years – just the kind of ammunition our malcontents need to peddle their silly rumours about money-laundering, the drugs trade and diamond-dealing.

The senators also reveal that $35m was wired directly out of the government's main treasury account into secret offshore companies, at least one of which was controlled by our president. And as for the rest of the $700m that Riggs looked after for us? When the main oil companies (ExxonMobil, Amerada Hess and Marathon) need something – employees, guards, land, housing – they go to companies controlled by the president, his family or other senior people in government.

Hess, the smallest producer, forked out $445,800 for one property to a 14-year-old relative of Obiang. When an Equatorial Guinea court ordered Hess to pay rent to the property's rightful owner, a company official told senators that the 14-year-old's godfather, also a government minister, had simply called up the judge and ordered him to change his mind!

Riggs broke so many rules that it copped a $25m fine and has been bought out. Oil companies have been more casual. ExxonMobil didn't even bother to file answers about some its more murky transactions. And the senate can do nothing about Banco Santander, HSBC and Lloyds, which have also looked after our money. Our senator friends have been distinctly underwhelmed. Carl Levin says he doesn't see "any difference between dealing with an Obiang and dealing with a Saddam Hussein"; Norm Coleman calls Obiang "a brutal dictator, a bad guy… [with] a ton of money… in Washington."

Official reaction has a Canute-like sense of defiance. The report has "nothing to do with our government, nor with our dignitaries", according to information minister, Alfonso Mokuy. Such Alice in Wonderland analysis is clearly infectious: Henry Page of Penningtons, the British legal firm helping with our mercenary problem, gamely says suspects here will receive a fair trial – even though they were held for nearly five months without charge or access to lawyers!

But should this be any surprise? There was only one European country to come out and declare our last election, won by Obiang supporters with the traditional 98 out of 100 seats, to have been free and fair. The same country flew out ballot boxes at the cost of tens of thousands of pounds. Thanks be to the UK!

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "What is all the fuss about? What did we do wrong?" Flora Marinescu asked police officers as they came to arrest her and her family in her tiny Romanian village, 160km southwest of Bucharest. "If you're right, then it doesn't matter, because Toma was already dead before we dug him up and rekilled him. But if we're right, then we were slaying a vampire in the noble and time-honoured way before he could rise from the grave, and perhaps saving hundreds of lives. Is that so wrong?"

According to Constantin Ghindeano of the Romanian State Police, what had taken place in the cemetery was very wrong indeed. "The Marinescu family freely admit that they dug up the body of their son-in-law Toma Petre on the night after he was buried, ripped out his heart, burned it to ashes, mixed it with water, and drank it. But they say they were vampire slaying, and insist it's a local custom that's been passed down from mother to daughter for generations. Many people in this area believe in vampires, and fear them, so they approve of these ritual rekillings. But there's too much of it going on round here, and we're determined to make the population realise that vampires aren't real, and that dead bodies in graves shouldn't be dug up and killed again, even by relatives."

Flora was later charged with disturbing the peace of the dead, an offence that carries a maximum three-year jail term. *(Northern Star [New South Wales], 10/4/04. Spotter: Norm Reynolds)*

– ● –

● *"We're not talking about retards here, they're a perfectly intelligent couple," Dr Friedrich Schmidt of the University of Luebeck in-vitro fertilisation clinic told reporters. "So when they came to the clinic and said they wanted to have a baby, we performed all our standard tests on them. They both proved to be perfectly fertile, and it was only when we asked them how often they had sex, and they replied 'we're not exactly sure what you mean,' that we began to suspect something was wrong."*

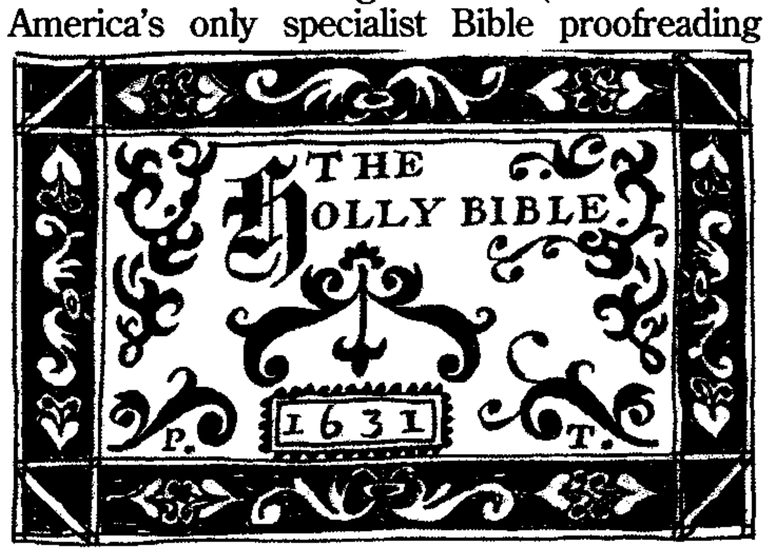
Earlier, Dr Schmidt had explained the circumstances in which the unnamed couple (both in their early thirties) had first approached the clinic. "They were both brought up in a strict religious environment, and knew nothing at all about the sexual process. As we talked, it became clear that they had never had sexual intercourse, or even knew that such a thing was possible. They thought that all they had to do to make a baby was lie next to each other at night in their bedclothes and something would happen. But nothing did happen, except that they both got a lot of sleep.

"After five years of marriage, the wife still had not become pregnant. Then they read about in-vitro fertilisation, so they withdrew their life savings of Euros 15,000 and came to us. We've told them to keep their money, and sent them on a sexual therapy course." (ANI [Asian News International], 18/5/04. Spotter: Timothy Tomalin-Reeves)

– ● –

● "With an ordinary book, you can put up with a few typos, because it's not something you're basing your whole life on," June Gunden of the Peachtree Editorial and Proofreading Service told reporters in Peachtree, Georgia. "But Bible readers are less forgiving of errors, because they regard the text as a set of rules for living, and a single missing word can have devastating consequences. So to us, proofreading the Bible is more than a job description, it's a calling."

Her husband Doug Gunden (co-founder of America's only specialist Bible proofreading



company) then explained that "with so many millions of words in the Bible, all kinds of things can and have gone wrong. The most famous error was in a 1631 King James edition which left a word out, and printed the commandment 'thou shalt commit adultery'. But there have been plenty of mistakes in modern editions too. Some of the most notorious typos in published twentieth-century editions are:

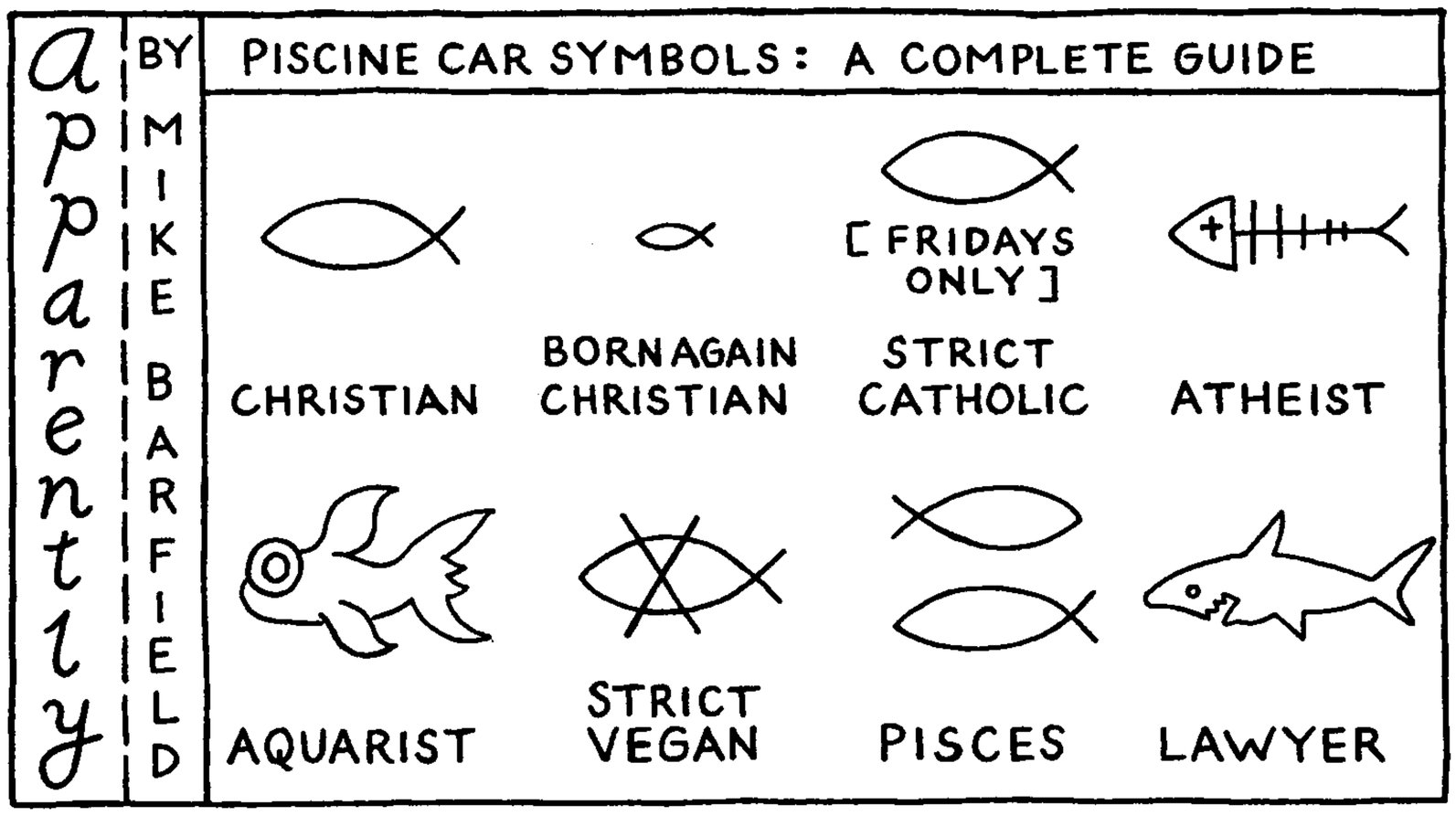
'Go and sin on more' (instead of 'no more'), John 8:11;

'Let the children first be killed' (instead of 'filled'), Mark 7:27;

'I will that women adorn themselves in modern apparel' (instead of 'modest'), 1 Timothy 2:9;

'Know ye not that the unrighteous shall inherit the kingdom of God' ('not' was omitted), 1 Corinthians 6:9.

"So far, no serious typos have ever been spotted in a Bible that's been proofread by Peachtree, although an advertisement for our services did once describe us as 'poofreaders'. But we're not complacent, and always start each project with a prayer." *(AP, 19/5/04. Spotter: Brendan J. O'Byrne)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

And isn't it good that the sun's shining at last, just as I said it would!

As you know, Cherie and I and the family are taking a well-earned break in Barbados, thanks to the generous hospitality of that long-time friend of the parish Cliff Richard (who sang in our choir back in the 1950s, and whose faith has been a shining example to us all for so many decades)!

Before I pack my bags, I would like just to say a word or two about Mr Mandelson's new appointment as the parish's representative on the steering committee of the European Interpastoral Union.

There has been, I know, a good deal of misunderstanding about the reasons behind my decision to send Peter on this very important mission which, for a while, will take him out of the day-to-day life of the parish.

Some parishioners have got the idea that Peter and I both wished for him to be reinstated on the PCC, where he could have played a key part in shaping our exciting five-year plan to revitalise the parish.

According to these gossips and rumour-mongers, Peter's return to the PCC was only frustrated when at an angry meeting the rest of the PCC, led by Mr Prescott and Mr Straw, threatened to resign if our former

churchwarden was brought back to his former role sitting next to me at PCC meetings and telling me what to do.

What nonsense! Peter has always been very popular with the PCC, even among those who do not like or trust him!

No, the reason for his new appointment is that he is quite simply THE BEST MAN FOR THE JOB, as he himself has so often pointed out!

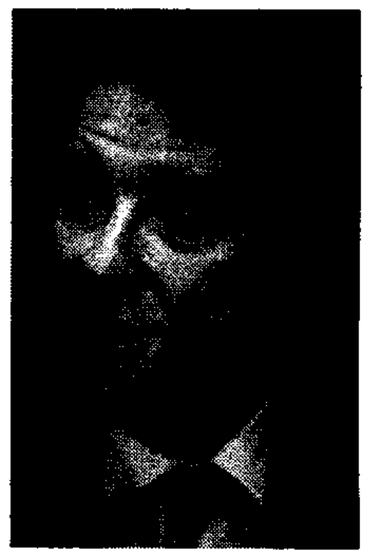
So, let's put an end to all this silly tittle-tattle, shall we, and draw a line under the malicious gossip.

It is time to move on, and I hope that when I come back from my working holiday, parishioners will have pulled themselves together and found something rather more important to occupy their minds than engaging in unhelpful speculation about the man I am pleased to call "Peter, my rock".

Yours, in holiday mood!

Tony

A Statement From Mr Mandelson



As the Vicar has made clear, I am very happy to take up my very challenging new post in Belgium, acting on behalf of the parish. I am not surprised that the Vicar's courageous and eminently sensible decision has excited such an outburst of envious spite and malevolence from the usual suspects here at St Albion's. I am not going to glorify them by mentioning their names, but Mr Straw and Mr Kilfoyle will know who I mean!

Let the little people sneer! I have become well used over the years to hearing this kind of bitchy backbiting about all my efforts to help the Vicar. But I want you all to know that I am big enough to let this kind of thing not bother me in the slightest.

That is the why I propose to take absolutely no notice of what these people are saying. It is simply what I have come to expect, and nothing whatever would be gained by my attempting to answer these pathetic slurs in this newsletter.

I will merely point out that, as the Vicar has made clear, I am simply the best qualified person to take on this job.

I have long been the foremost champion of our involvement in this great oecumenical experiment, and I can't think of anyone better to put the point of view of St Albion's to our European brethren.

But I would like to make one final point.

Although I naturally welcome my new appointment, and Reinaldo and I intend to take the fullest advantage of our time together in the lovely city of Brussels, I wish to emphasise that my new job is only a temporary one.

I will be keeping in very regular contact with the Vicar, to discuss parish matters, and in due course I have every intention of returning to my proper place on the PCC.

Meanwhile, I want you all to remember that I know where you live. OK?

Peter Mandelson,

Temporary Address: Rue des Matelots 41, Bruxelles, Belgium.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Coming this autumn:

The Roy Jenkins Lecture (Church Hall, October 7)

'The Sinning Sixties – Where Did We All Go Wrong?'

The Vicar will look back to the decade which, as he says, "led us all astray". He will explain why everything that is wrong in the parish, from graffiti on the Millennium Tent to the Dirty Des Mags and Video Emporium behind the chip shop in the High Street, can be blamed on the 1960s. One definitely not to miss!

Tickets available from Mrs Jowell, Chair of the PCC Sub-Committee on Culture, Sport and Leisure Activities.

Important Notice: In future, no cakes or refreshments will be available at parish events, in accordance with the advice of the parish's "all powerful" Health and Safety Committee!

Thank you John!

A big thank you to our faithful security officer John Scarlett for all this diligent work in protecting the parish. John gets a lot of flak and people say he just does what I tell him. But, hey, what's wrong with that? (T.B)

CLINTON BACKS CLINTON

IN A barnstorming speech to the Democratic Convention in Boston, Bill Clinton gave his wholehearted support to himself in the party's quest to find a presidential candidate for the White House this autumn.

"There can be no question that the man to beat George Bush in November is me," charismatic Clinton told the cheering party faithful.

"But I can't stand, so you'll just have to make do with that dull, boring John Kerry instead until Hillary can have a go in 2008."

JOB SHOCK FOR BBC NEWS CHIEF

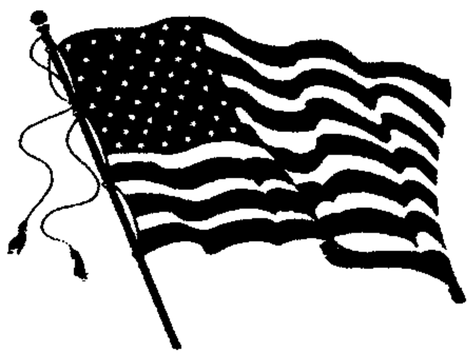
by Our Media Correspondent **Lord Wreath**

RICHARD SAMBROOK, the BBC's former Head of News, denied that he had become the latest casualty of the Hutton Inquiry following a reshuffle of top jobs at the corporation.

"I have certainly not been 'moved sideways'," insisted Sambrook, who will take up his new job as director of World Service and Global News on 1 September in Antarctica.

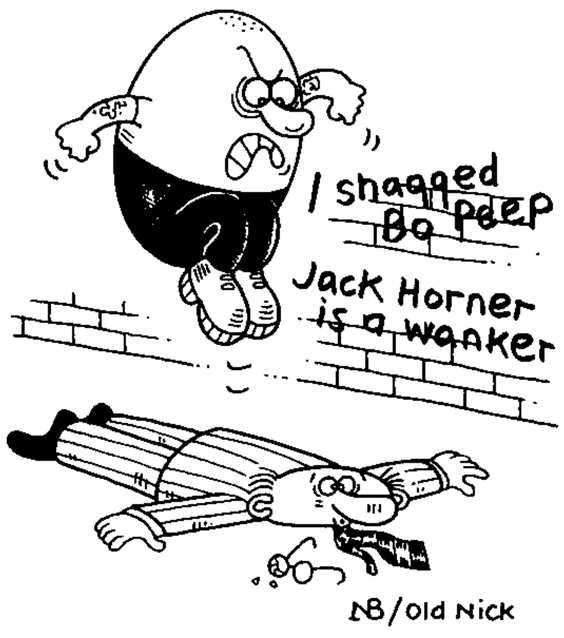
"As I will be permanently based at the South Pole, it's more of a move southwards."

THAT JOHN KERRY VISION FOR AMERICA IN FULL



- **I went to Vietnam.**
- **George Bush didn't.**
- **Iraq... bit of a mess.**
- **Er...**
- **That's it.**

MODERN NURSERY RHYMES



THE ALTERNATIVE VOICE

with **DEIRDRE SPART** (Co-Chair of the Tufnell Park Stop The War, Smash Blunkett and Save The Slugs Animal Rights Coalition)

Er... once again totally predictably the capitalist media have demonstrated their total and utter contempt for all normal codes of human decency by devoting literally acres of space to the achievements of our Comrade Dave Spart the greatest orator and agitator of our time. What right have these Bush-loving fatcats of the media to express any opinion whatsoever about our fallen comrade whose life was dedicated to smashing the whole corrupt bourgeois fascist system which allows them to exploit the working class er by sitting in the back of chauffeur-driven limousines and stuffing their ***(cont'd p. 94)***

THE ASIAN CUP, expanded to 16 teams, kicked off in Beijing last night, with **China** defeating **Bahrain** 2-2.

Observer

GLENDA SLAGG

BRITAIN'S MINI HEAT WAVE

■ **THE POPE?!! Arenchasick of him!?! According to this boring old boy in a wheelchair, women and men are totally different??!?**

What does he know about it for GAWDSAKE??!??

I mean to say, when did he last have sex???!!

And you don't need to be a rocket scientist to answer that one??!??

■ HATS OFF to His Holiness the Pope??!??

At last, someone's had the guts to spell it out – even if it's been obvious for billions of years!!!??

Fellahs are fellahs and gals are gals!???!

And that's the way we like it???!?

■ **HANG OUT the flags for Danny Williams!!!!?**

He's the Battling Boxer from Brixton who's stormed into the record books and given British sports fans something to smile about!!???!

OK, so he only KOed out a middle-aged former drug addict who could hardly stand up!!??!

Who cares???!?

■ THREE CHEERS for the BBC Prom Season!!??!!!

Out go fuddy-duddy old men playing the piano!!?!

In come sexy young dollies doing their thing??!?!

No wonder the Promenaders are a-frettin' and a-sweatin' as the mini-skirted misstros strut their stuff!!???!

■ HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Holiday Hunks:

● **John Kenny** – I'm Glenda Slagg – and I'm reporting for DOOTY!!!?! Geddit????!

● **Jerry Vlasak** – He's the whacky Animal Rights campaigner Blunkett won't let in!!???! Don't give up, Big Boy??!? I'm all for a bit of animal experimentation myself!!???!

● **Yasmin Alibhai Brown** – Crazy name, crazy Gal!!!?!?

Byeeee!!!

"Go in, stay in, tune in... *...Throw out"*

Eye Exclusive

'MY NIGHTS OF SHAME'

Does Big Ron Face The Sack?

*by **E.I. Addio**, Our Man In Soho Square With A Cheese And Ostrich Steak Ciabatta Sarnie And A Copy Of 'More Asian Babes'*

THE soccer world was rocked to its foundations last night when a Sunday newspaper revealed that top manager Ron Knee, 59, had enjoyed a steamy night of shame with the club's PA, petite, pouting Doreena Slappah, 38.

Earlier, the tight-lipped Neasden Bridge supremo had issued a statement through his solicitors, Feiner, de Smith and Gottlieb, of Station Crescent, Neasden, categorically denying the allegations and threatening to issue proceedings against the North Circular Advertiser, a local freesheet, under the new Human Rights Act.

Sven Year Itch

But last night a tearful Knee admitted to reporters that his earlier denial had been a "lapse in judgement".

Faced with a set of photographs shot in the Sauna and Jacuzzi Experience at the Neasden Ramada, Knee broke down and admitted that he and Miss Slappah had engaged in "an intimate act".

Penalty Shoot Out

The story then took an unexpected twist when Miss Slappah admitted that, in addition to her illicit tryst with the ashen-faced supremo, she had previously been 'escorted' by the club's chairman, Launderama magnate Lord Cohen of Mill Hill (formerly Brigadier 'Buffy' Cohen).

Said Slappah, "He was a real gentleman. I enjoyed a romantic evening with Lord Cohen, drinking Chardonnay in his £285,000 luxury penthouse flat overlooking Neasden railway station".

The shocking series of sleaze stories last night engulfing the Neasden club led to calls for Knee to be sacked from his prestigious three-figures-a-year post at the Bridge.

But angry fans (Sid and Doris Bonkers) were quick to rally to the defence of the Squirrels' Mr Big.

Sweet FA

Said a defiant Sid Bonkers, "In my opinion, what Ron has done is not a sacking issue. A bit of slap and tickle is what the public has come to expect as part of the footballing ethos of our time.

"Despite his age, Big Ron has become a role model and an icon for a whole generation of fans."

Ron Knee is 59.

LATE RESULT

Pre-Season Friendly

Neasden XI 0
Atletico Gozo 14
(Mintoff 6, Grima 4, Gove 2, Pevsner 2 [o.g.])

Stop Press
TRANSFER MOVE DENIED

THE STORM of speculation surrounding the possible sale of Neasden's star striker, the spud-faced Baldy Pevsner, 82, to Real Madrid for an indisclosed two-figure fee last night provoked categorical denials from the player's lawyer, Morry Gottlieb, a senior partner in the highly-respected firm of North London solicitors, Feiner, de Smith and Gottlieb. In a statement, Pevsner's adviser said, "Baldy is going nowhere, and that's official. He has just signed a contract which will see him putting on a Neasden number 13 shirt until he is 105".

"Best sherpa I've ever found"

Nursery Times

Friday, 6 August, 2004

DEFENCE CUTS HIT HISTORIC REGIMENTS

by Our Tin Soldier Staff **Captain Corrells-Barnet**

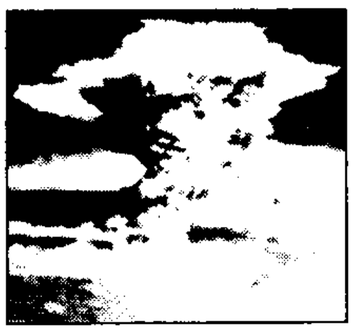
THE Grand Old Duke of York's regiment has been made the target of swingeing cutbacks in the latest defence review which has reduced the once-proud fighting force to a shadow of its former strength.

Said one military expert, "The Grand Old Duke of York, he had ten thousand men, but now he's got three and a laptop".

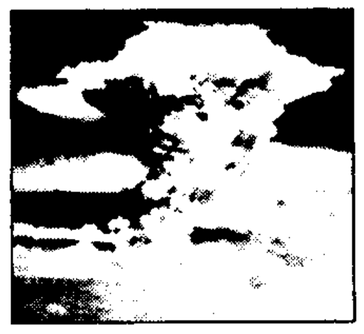
When asked whether he would be marching this new streamlined rapid response unit anywhere, the Grand Old Duke of York said, "Unlikely. Morale is very low. When we were up, we were up, but now we are very down indeed".

The Southern Reporter

CAPTION CAPTION: about these pious little bleeders and the lady busser doing that interminably boring thing so cherished by Border festivals. What on earth is going on in this picture – these people have got to get out more often.



HM Government



PREPARING FOR EMERGENCIES

A Personal Message To All Householders from The Rt Hon David Blunkett MP.

HOMEOWNERS

When a copy of this leaflet falls through your letterbox it is VERY IMPORTANT that you should not be worried.

DON'T PANIC.

The purpose of this leaflet is to warn you that at any moment you may be the victim of a terrorist outrage.

What Will It Be Like?

At the moment we cannot specify, for security reasons, the nature of the threat which is facing us all.

- **It could be a 57-megaton nuclear device landing in your garden.**
- **It could be a deadly nerve gas seeping under your door or coming up through your drains.**
- **It could be a swarm of deadly killer bees swooping through your loft window or catflap.**

But it is very important to keep things in proportion.

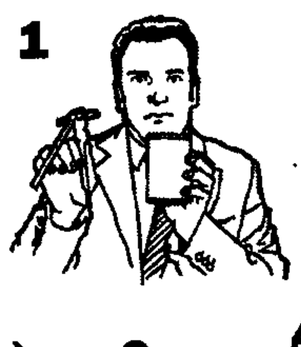
It is vital that, on reading this leaflet, you should not be alarmed or panic..

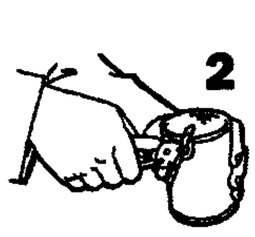
ARE YOU PREPARED FOR THE HOLOCAUST THAT COULD BE WAITING JUST AROUND THE CORNER?

Here are some essential steps which every householder must take to survive the death threat from beyond.

❶Food

It is vital that you stock up with sufficient food for you and your family for what could be years.





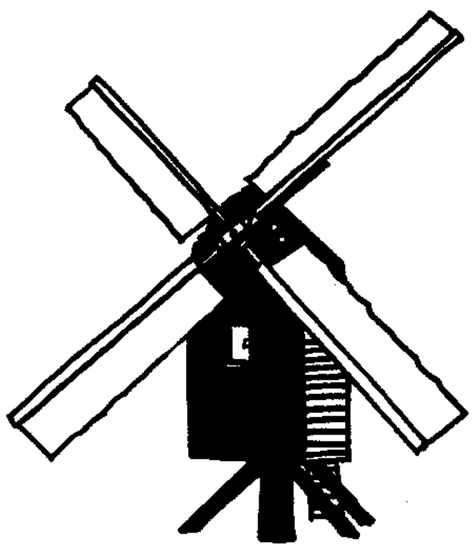
Recommended items include:

- **24 sacks of flour**
- **12 crates of Pot Noodles**
- **400 tins of Baked Beans**
- **16,000 cans of lager (brand optional)**

DO NOT FORGET YOUR PETS.They too will need feeding! *(Remember: It is an offence under the new Animal Rights Act to expose your pet to starvation during a national emergency. Goldfish excepted.)*

❷Other Essential Non-Food Items

Ensure a plentiful supply of warm blunketts and torch batteries.



- **One petrol-driven generator *OR* 2-megawatt wind turbine on roof.**
- **Tin opener**
- **Shampoo** *(as this may become scarce as the earth disintegrates).*

(SUGGESTION: This pamphlet, which is printed on recycled paper from sustainable forestry, can itself be recycled to make the equivalent of ten sheets of luxury toilet tissue.)

❸How To Keep In Touch With The Outside World

In the event of the world coming to an end, you should keep your radio or television set tuned in at all times, for further instructions from the Emergency Powers.

If you are for any reason unable to read this pamphlet, copies are available from your local town hall in the following languages:

Gujerati, Urdu, Estonian, Etonian, Malibu, Rumbabese, Maldivian, Salami, Cornish, Clotted Cream.

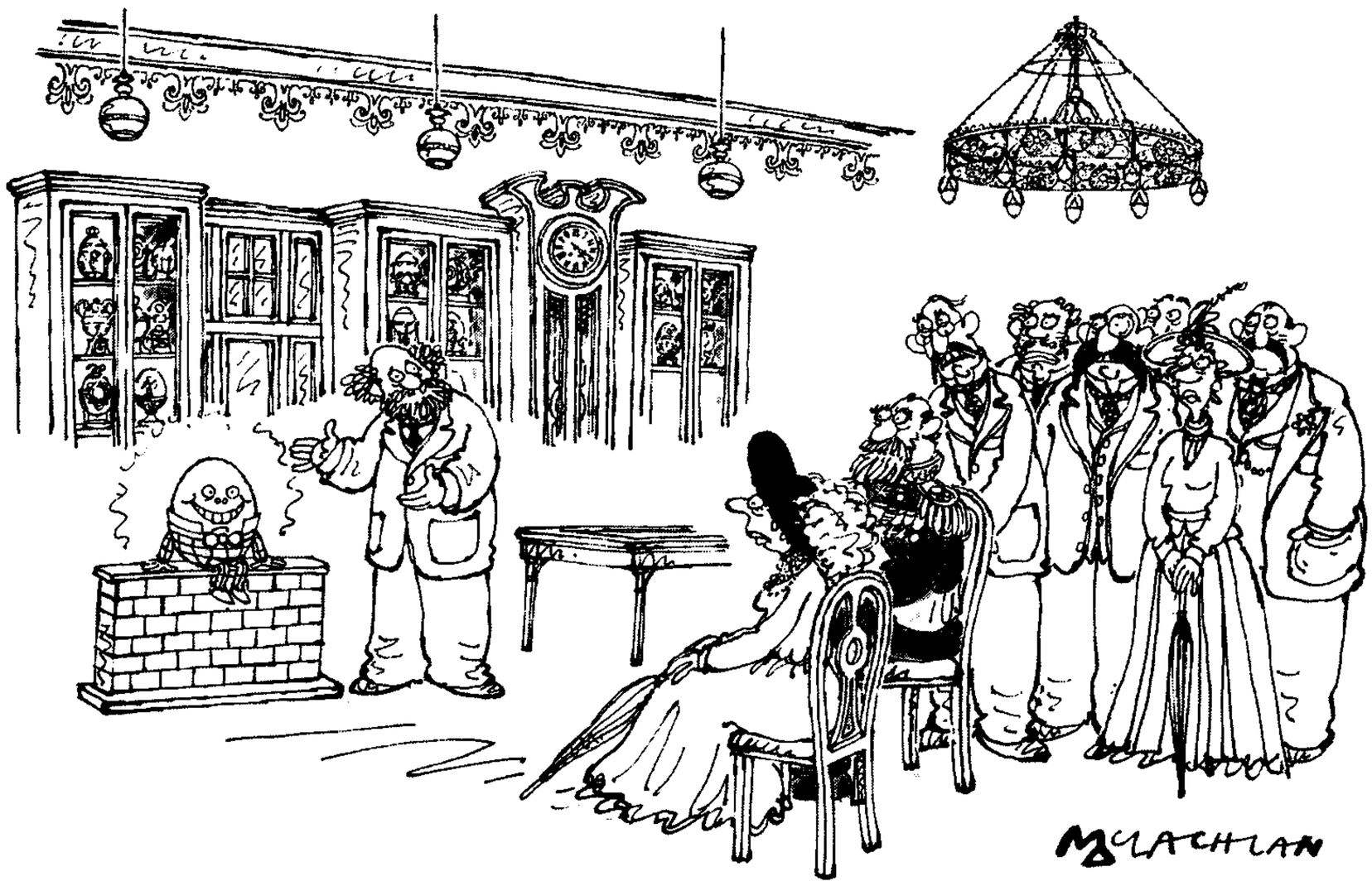
Copies in Braille may be downloaded from the Internet.

This leaflet is also available in cassette form from www.wereallDoomed.gov.uk

IMPORTANT

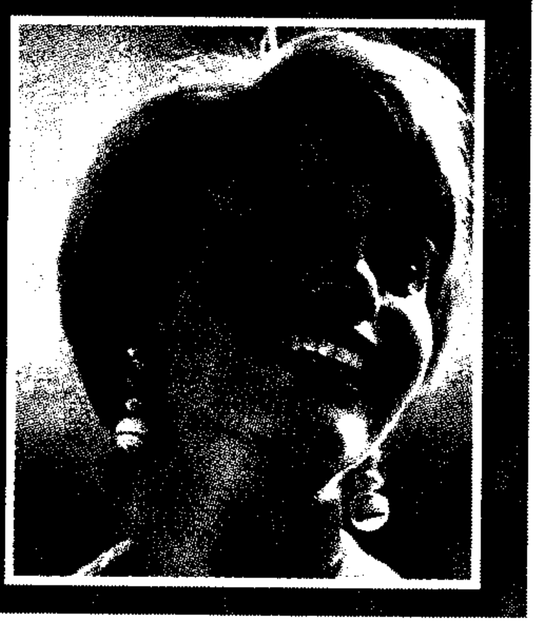
This leaflet is only intended as a guideline to assist you in preparing for the catastrophe which we are predicting could happen at any moment. Whatever you do, don't panic and do not spread alarm among your neighbours.

© D. Blunkett, Wasteofmoney Productions 2004.



"If I might say so, your Majesty, not one of Fabergé's best efforts"

POLLY FILLER



ADMIT it, girls! There is no point whatsoever in driving the four hundred yards to St Tweazles Day Nursery For The Gifted Toddler in a socking great 4x4 off-roader! The only road it's off is the King's Road! And it's nothing to do with keeping your precious kiddies safe inside the so-called protective shell of the 8-litre Daihatsu Showoff Excelsior with its 8-seat put-me-up capacity, integrated CD burner and satellite navigation in the boot. (Besides, Rachel and Rebecca, you really should know your way to St Dunce's by now, it's at the end of your street, where it's always been!)

No, the reason you swan about in these giant gas-guzzlers is not safety – it's pure exhibitionism! My one's bigger than yours and Henry's got a bigger bonus than Clive. Honestly, girls, haven't we got beyond that sort of snobbery?!?

These metal monsters are not so much "off-roaders" as "toff-roaders"!!!! (And don't steal this joke any of you fellow lifestyle columnists with space to fill in August because my lawyers will be watching!)

What's more, the way women drive these bully-mobiles to school would put a German panzer division to shame! It's the Battle of the Bulge, only in Notting Hill, and instead of General Patten in his Sherman tank, we have to put up with Arabella ("Wombat") in her Mitsubishi Gigantica with de luxe stereo wheels and galvanized dog bar.

It makes me ashamed to be a mother, seeing some of my fellow school mums barging other people off the road in their mad dash to drop off Minty, Bas, Cloris and Agamemnon in time for their Suzuki cello class!

WELL, let me assure you of one thing, obergrüppen mothers(!), you won't see Polly Filler smugly sitting above the traffic lording it over everyone else in her Toyota Lebensraum Cruiser with heated accelerator pedal and automatic DVD/dishwasher combo!!!

No. That's because we've got a new au pair from Iraq to drive it for us and I wouldn't argue with her, Arabella, she has seen more burnt-out cars than you've had hot waxes!! Brmm! Brmm!

© *Polly Filler.*

the PREMIERSH*TS

PAUL WOAD
WELL THE NEW SEASON'S ABOUT TO BEGIN...
CHANGIN ROOM
SO I HOPE YOU'RE ALL FULLY FIT AND WEARING THE RIGHT PROTECTION
SHIN PAD
BUT JUST IN CASE, I'VE GOT SOME SPARES!
CHEERS SVEN!
CONDOMS
BABES MAGAZINE
COOL SHAGGIN' DUDE

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

SIR MALCOLM RIFKIND

Sir Malcolm, you don't strike me as particularly a spoon person. Would that be right?

I want to make clear immediately that I have no special qualifications to talk about spoons. The last thing I would wish to do is to set myself up as in any way an expert on this particular variety of tableware.

All the same, I take it that you must have spoons of your own?

Don't get me wrong! I have a keen interest in every variety of spoon, and should the occasion arise, I think I could do as good a job as anyone else, if push came to shove.

What sort of occasion do you have in mind?

Just let me say this. I do not believe in trying to predict the future. 'Take one day at a time' has always seemed to me an admirable policy for a politician. But of course it would be foolish to deny that there are not circumstances in which I might be prepared to put forward my claim to lead the national debate on spoons. It would be a challenge, but one which I would not shrink from accepting, were others to indicate their support for my candidacy.

Are you sure we are still talking about spoons, Sir Malcom?

Very definitely. I see the British spoon as second to none, if only someone with the right experience was in a position to give the lead that so many people are crying out for.

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

I would like to make it clear that I wholeheartedly support Michael Howard, who is proving himself to be an extremely able leader.

NEXT WEEK: Sir Simon Rattle "Me And My Rattle".

VOTE FOR US — WE'RE USELESS

Howard's Shock Plea

by Our Political Staff **Peter O'Bore**

THE WORLD of Westminster was rocked to its foundations yesterday when Tory leader Michael Howard asked voters to support his party at the next election because they were the underdogs and likely to lose.

As polls showed the Tories trailing fourth on 8 percent, Mr Howard said "We in this country have a long tradition of sticking up for the underdog and the no-hoper.

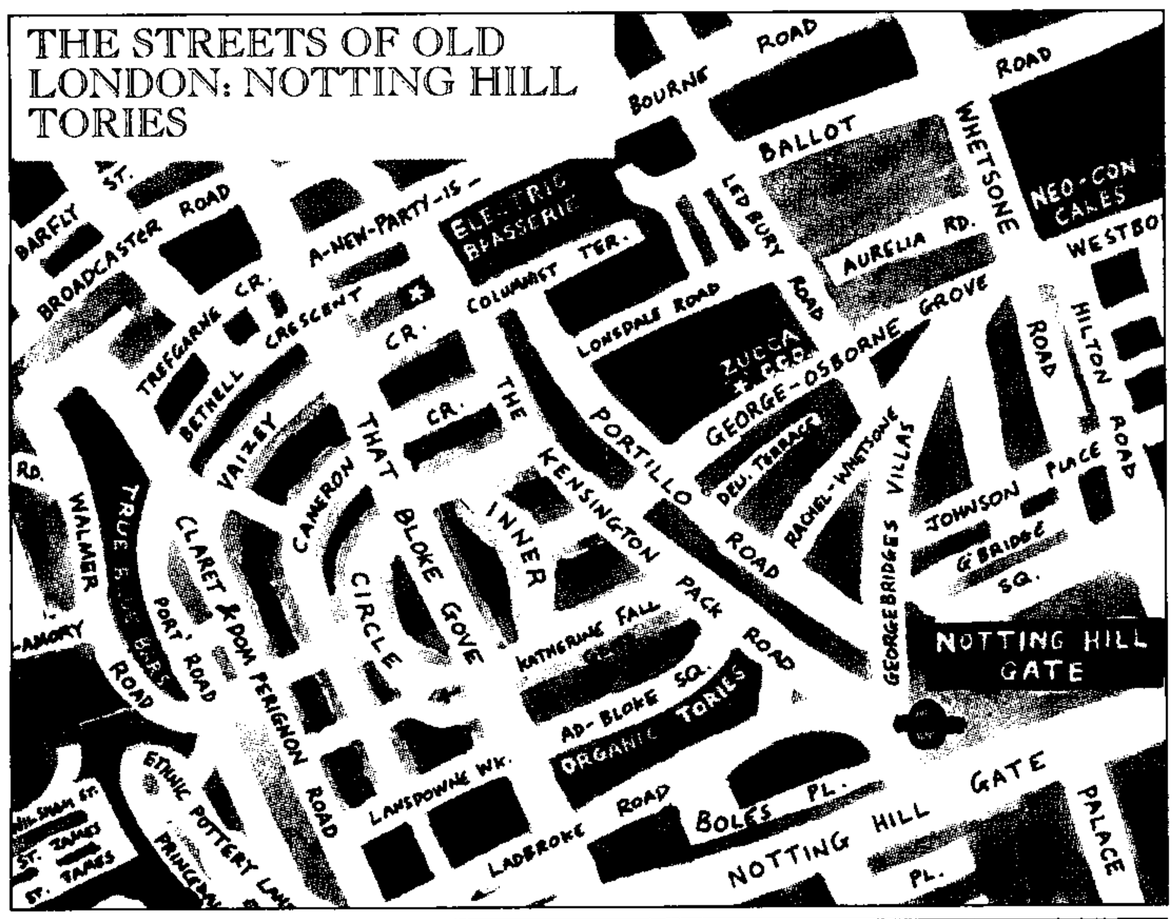
"That is why I am asking the British people to rally round to the Tories in our hour of need. We have nothing to offer except that we are useless."

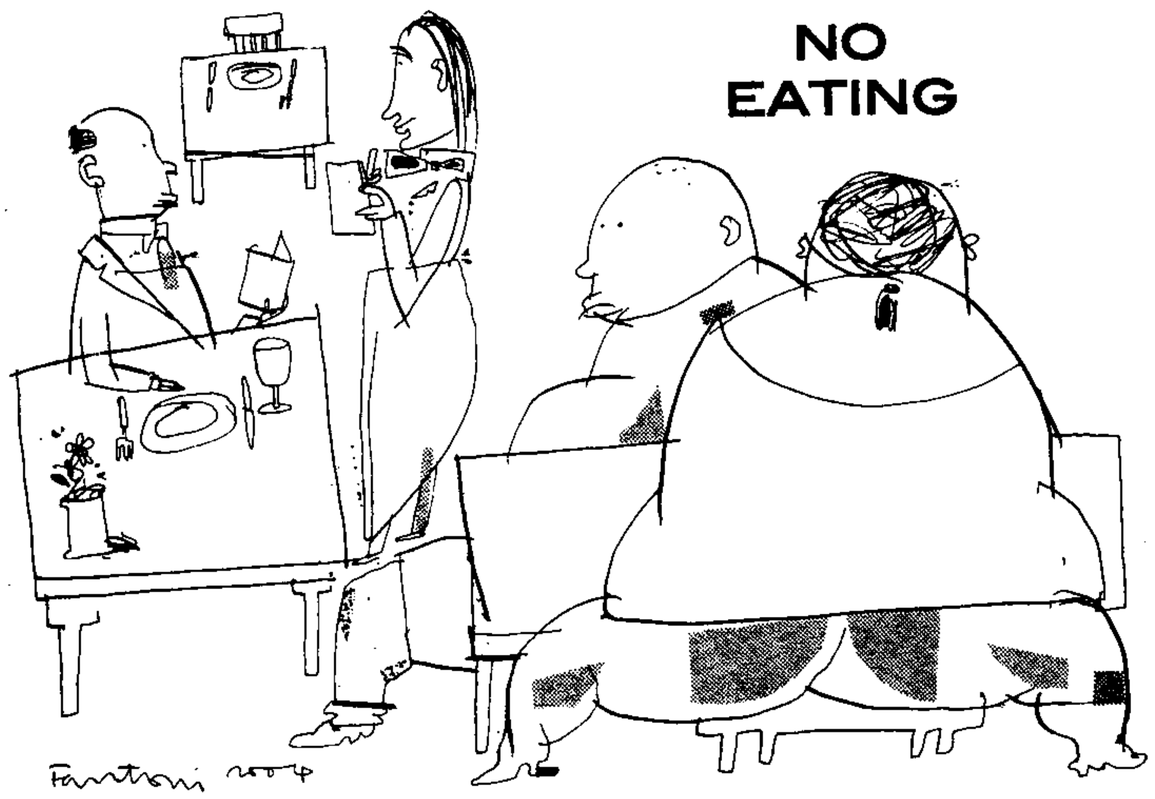
(Peter O'Bore is the author of the recently published book Hello D'Oliveira)

Who Are They — The New 'Notting Hill Mafia' Who Will Turn The Tory Party Upside Down?

- They all live in W11
- They meet regularly in smart wine bars and fashionable restaurants
- They all live in Notting Hill
- They talk to each other on mobile telephones
- They all tell each other how clever they are
- Their unofficial leader is a mysterious figure called Gove (pronounced 'Guv')

For full story on the 'Ladbroke Gove Set' see p. 94





OLYMPIC SPECIAL

ATHENS 04

As the eyes of the world focus *(Surely 'close with boredom'? Ed.)* on the greatest festival of the sporting calendar, the *Eye* picks out the six competitors whose feats will soon be the talk of the planet *(Surely 'nobody at all'? Ed.).*

Paavi Nøgud

Six months ago the 23-stone Finnish underwater weightlifter was an unknown health and safety inspector. Today he is poised on the brink of global stardom in the 3-Snatch Freestyle Synchronised Tango (Bantamweight Division).

Jiffie-Lou Goldberg

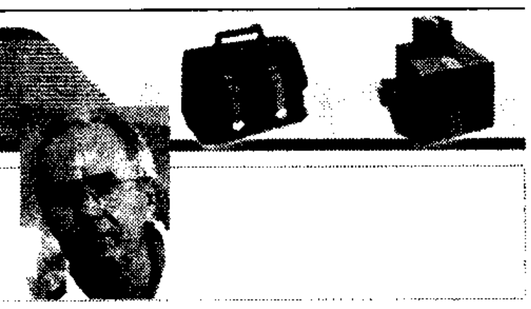
This 19-year-old jet plane on legs has taken the world of 500-metre running by storm with her spectacular use of performance-enhancing pharmaceutical products. Says Jiffie, *"No one in Athens is going to catch me – I hope!"*

Klaus Boremann

At 93, this former Darmstadt postman could write his name into the record books when he becomes the first man in history to lift gold in the new Olympic sport of dominoes. He may, on the other hand, die in the attempt.

(That's enough 'Six To Watch')

My eBay



svengor-the-mighty (442)

Items I'm Bidding On (1-4 of 4 items)

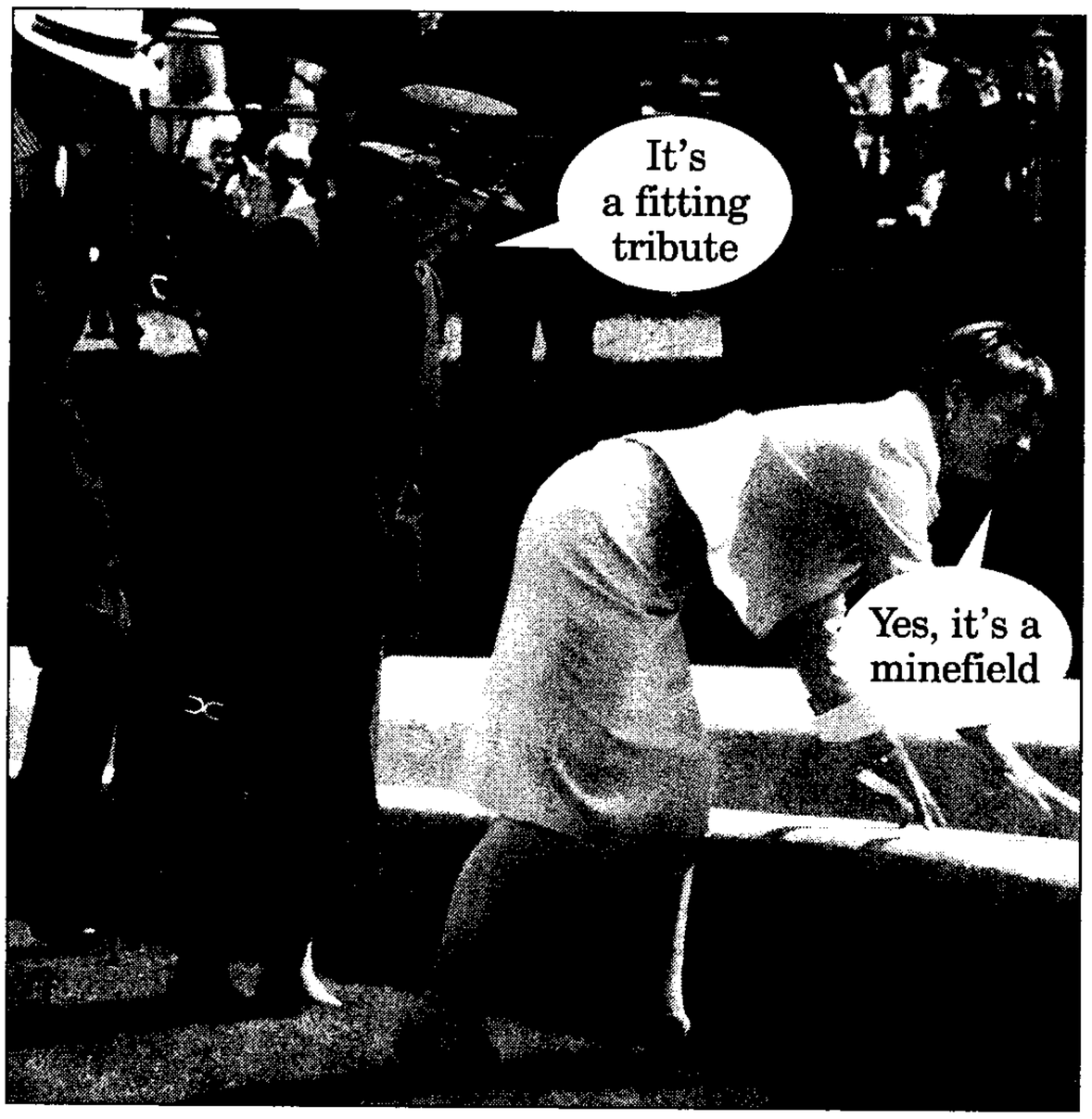
	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐ 'ManMusk' Subtle Pheromonal Female Attractant – 1ltr bottle	£59.99	£9.99	1
☐ TWISTER – fun game, hilarious positions! – worn mat, dented box, otherwise good	£2.99	£1.50	1
☐ Viking Helmet, lighweight, one horn slightly loose	£9.99	£3.50	1
☐ COOL Medallion and chain, inscribed 'Hi, Baby', Gold effect (tarnished)	£15.99	£0.49	1

Items I'm Selling (1-2 of 2 items)

	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐ Linguaphone Italian Course (Advanced), complete, hardly used	£19.99	£1.50	0
☐ Glass football trophy cabinet – as new	£50.00	Buyer to collect	1

of people seriously injured on the county's roads. Sadly, the numbers of those killed on our roads has not improved, despite the considerable effort from the Constabulary and a range of partners.

Policing Cumbria



DIANA FOUNTAIN FAILURE

Duke of Edinburgh To Blame

by Our Conspiracy Staff **Water Mitty**

AN EXTRAORDINARY new explanation for the persistent technical problems besetting the Princess Diana Memorial Fountain was advanced last night.

According to top fountain expert, Mohammed Al Fayed, the reason the water has failed to cascade in soothing rivulets is because the Duke of Edinburgh has been clogging up the mechanism with leaves. Said Mr Al Fayed, "Every fuggin' night he rides up in his coach and fuggin' four and clogs up the fuggin' fountain with leaves and dead badgers and white fuggin' Fiat Unos, it's the fuggin' truth, he's fuggin' crazy, I tell you."

Late news

POLICE IN BNP BAN

BRITISH National Party chiefs have warned members that anyone joining the police will be expelled from the party.

"The last thing we want is for the BNP's good name to be smeared by being linked to an organisation with such a dodgy reputation for institutional racism," said party spokesman Al White.

BIG BROTHER BLAMED FOR TEEN SEX EPIDEMIC

HEALTH chiefs are blaming reality TV shows like Big Brother for the huge rise in sexually transmitted diseases.

A medical expert said, "This year's Big Brother is so pisspoor that thousands of viewers are simply going out and have unprotected casual sex with any Tom, Dick or Harriet rather than sit through another abysmal episode."

"Yeah, I make everything from old tyres"

Notes & Queries

QUESTION: What is the longest novel ever written? *Anne Orak, Todmorden.*

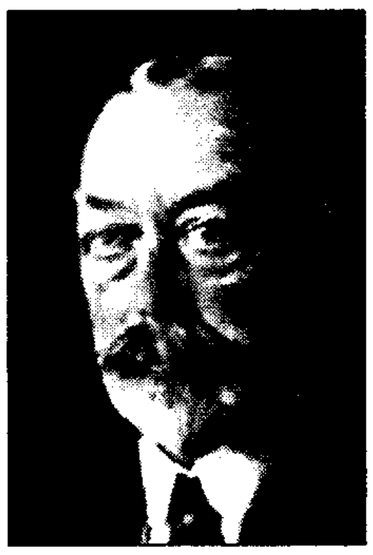
☐ CONTRARY to popular belief, Proust's *Recherche du Temps Perdu*, at 1,531,216 words, is far from being the world's longest novel. A 19th-century Norwegian clergyman, Pastor Olaf Lurpak, spent 64 years writing a novel entitled *The Saga Of Sven Fjordsmansson,* set between the 8th and 19th centuries, which reconstructs in exhaustive detail the history of a family of fisherfolk who eke a meagre living in the tiny village of Nijsdøn in the Norwegian far north. Lurpak's 20-million-page epic took so long to read that no publisher lived long enough to finish it. The book was therefore never published, but, after Lurpak's death in 1895, the manuscript was carried in 20 ox-carts to a specially-built wooden museum on a hillside outside Nijsdøn. There for some years it was made available to the scholars of the world but sadly none of them responded to the challenge. In 1927, alas, a fire caused by the knocking over of a kerosene lamp reduced Lurpak's masterpiece to four tons of ashes. These were ceremonially scattered by the mayor of Nijsdøn and his fellow villagers onto the waters of the fjord. In 1984 a commemorative plaque, jointly funded by the University of New Dworkin and the Women's Literary Circle of Neasdenburg in Florida, was erected on the site of the former Lurpak Museum and stands there to this day, as living testimony to the astonishing feat of Nijsdøn's industrious pastor and most famous son. *Gabriella Lurpak, New South Wales.*

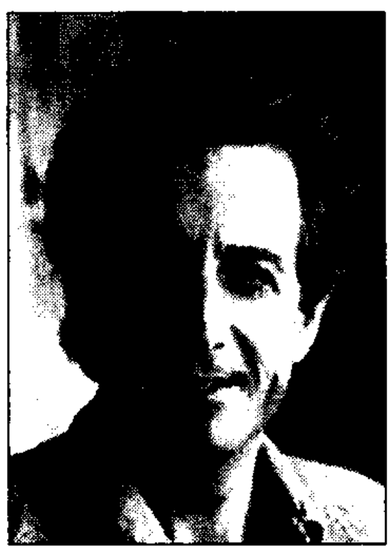
QUESTION: Why is the Lilo so called?

☐ MRS Rusbridger (24 May) is completely wrong when she informs us that the term 'Lilo' for an inflatable floating mattress was originally derived from the idea of a device on which one might "lie low". The inventor of the Lilo, Ernest Hislop (no relation), took the idea and the name of his invention from a portable bed which he observed on a visit to Tsientsin in the early 20th century. The bed, constructed from bamboo leaves and porcelain, had been designed by the legendary 16th-century monk Li-Lo. Hence the name! Q.E.D. Mrs Rusbridger should do her homework before bursting into print with her ill-informed views! *Edward de Bonio, Isle of Dogs.*

Answers, please, to the following: Do some spiders sing? Who was the first 'Lollipop Lady'? Has anyone ever laughed at one of Castro's cartoons in the *Spectator*?

DIARY





By kind permission of Her Majesty the Queen, BBC Radio Four and Lord Gnome are proud to present extracts from the unpublished diaries of HIS MAJESTY KING GEORGE V with an expert commentary by the distinguished Royal historian ROBERT LACEY

Robert Lacey: It gives me immense pleasure to address you, my people, from the gardens of Sandringham *[background noise of birds twittering]*. Behind me is the Norfolk home wherein King George V, that most humble yet conscientious of monarchs, would contemplate international events:

King George V: June the 28th 1914. Sandringham. Up at 7 o'Clock. Not much sun. Luncheon with Mama and then to my stamp collection. Bacon puts his head round the door to inform me that the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife have been assassinated. No further interruptions until tea-time. My new stamps from our dominion New Zealand look splendid on the page. Bed at 10.45.

Lacey: Every summer, King George V would follow the tradition set by his grandmother, Queen Victoria, in coming here to Balmoral *[background noise of birds twittering]* and then from Balmoral to their castle here in Windsor *[noise of birds twittering]* and from Windsor all the way back here, to his beloved Sandringham *[background noise of birds twittering]*. But The King never flinched from meeting the ordinary people, as this extract from his diaries so nobly demonstrates:

King George V: August 3rd 1914. A glorious day, nearly eighty degrees in the shade. Motored to King's Lynn. Met an ordinary person by chance. As I said to Bacon, these things happen. Inspected the silver in the afternoon. Bed at 10.45.

* * *

Lacey: The King sometimes came here, to the South of France *[background noise of birds twittering]* in the summer. But he did not do so this year. Wherever he was, whether here in Canada *[background noise of birds twittering]* or here, in Delhi *[background noise of birds twittering]* he always maintained a keen and conscientious eye on world *[background noise of birds twittering]* events, as we can see from this entry in his diary:

King George V: It's good to be at Sandringham. After luncheon, marked my new stamp catalogue. Bacon interrupted to inform me that my government had declared war against Germany. Most regrettable. Ham with carrots and boiled potatoes for dinner. Excellent. Bed at 11.15.

Lacey: The King was a deliciously keen observer of human affairs, as this diary entry makes clear:

King George V: August 16th 1914. Uncommonly hot. Lord Minto came to dinner with Lady Minto. The two of them are married, have been for many years, they tell me. For the most part, our dinner was accompanied by conversation. Lord and Lady Minto departed together in the same carriage. Bed at 11.30.

Lacey: Throughout the summer, the King maintained a punishing schedule, recording it all in his diary in his perfectly formed handwriting. His journals show that, when he reached the end of each line, he would start a new one, with the utmost skill. These extracts show calm and unruffled dignity he brought to his diaries:

King George V: August 17th 1914. A slight breeze in the air. Luncheon at 12.45. Stamps in the afternoon. Bed at 10.15.

King George V: August 18th 1914: Slightly colder but still pleasant. Bed at 10.40.

King George V: August 19th 1914: Not at all chilly. Bed at 10.40 (again).

* * *

Lacey: I am now standing in the 1844 Room, one of the most magnificent of the state rooms at Buckingham Palace, which looks out at the garden *[background noise of birds twittering]*. It was in this room that the King, whose political antennae, firmly grounded in commonsense, were second to none, convened a conference in 1914 to look into the Irish Question:

King George V: July 20th 1914. Quite sunny but with some light drizzle. I have asked my ministers to come up with an answer to the Irish Question. What is the question? The question is Irish. That much we have established. But if Irish is the question, what on earth is the answer? Heaven knows. I suspect it may be Irish. If we have an Irish Question, why not an Irish Answer? It would seem appropriate in the circumstances. But it really is high time we sorted out the question and the answer, or the whole thing might begin to grow tiresome. Luncheon of Roast Lamb and a selection of vegetables. Stamps, then bed at 10.50.

Lacey: The Irish Question was to preoccupy King George V and his ministers for some months:

King George V: September 5th 1914. A cloudy day, but not unpleasant. Breakfast at 7.30. We motor to Portsmouth, arriving at 12.45. I learnt with regret that the Irish Question remains unanswered. Luncheon at 1.30. Henry of Prussia comes to see me in the evening. Very Prussian. "And tell me, Henry how is Prussia?" I say. He kindly informs me Prussia is well. I show him my stamps. He takes the most keen interest. But as I reach for the 23rd volume, he remembers a sudden appointment back in Prussia and takes his leave. Bed at 11.30.

* * *

Lacey: I am now lying on the beach in Bermuda *[background noise of birds twittering]*. Behind me is a beautifully warm majestic blue sea *[noise of waves lapping]*. Sadly, King George V was never able to visit this, one of the most delightful of all his dominions. Instead, he spent the rest of the momentous year of 1914 at home dealing with news from the Front:

King George V: November 12th 1914. More rain in the night. Five degrees of frost this morning. Lord Roberts arrives with news from the Front. Apparently quite chilly, but with occasional sun. So much more enjoyable fighting in halfway decent weather. Marked my new stamp catalogue during afternoon and early evening. One stamp suffers slight nick. Most regrettable. Dinner with May. Bed at 11.15.

Lacey: King George V possessed the unquestioning nature that makes a good monarch.

King George V: December 19th 1914. So chilly it might almost be winter. Motored to Charing Cross hospital to meet soldiers back from the Front. Many of them without arms and legs, so extremely lucky to be in the Army at all. Stamps. Boiled chicken for dinner with Mama. Bed at 11.15.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE, PIXIE FROU-FROU, TO BECOME FAMOUS YOU HAD TO REALLY EXCEL AT SOMETHING...
TO BECOME A CELEBRITY YOU HAD TO BE INCREDIBLY SUCCESSFUL IN SPORT, ACTING OR IN MY CASE, MUSIC...
THESE DAYS, ALL YOU HAVE TO DO TO BE FEATURED IN MAGAZINES AND GET ON T.V. IS SLEEP WITH A BLOODY FOOTBALLER...
THANKS FOR THE TIP DAD, BUT I'M NOT ACTUALLY VERY INTERESTED IN FAMOUSNESS.
ALL I'M SAYING IS DON'T RULE IT OUT AS A CAREER OPTION...

Literary Review

Parsons knows

The Family Way

Tony Parsons

(HarperCollins, £17.99)

IT WAS great to have him back. That calm, rugged, growling authorial voice. Telling you not just how it was. But what to think, too. Because that's what readers wanted, wasn't it?

Those well-worn clichés.

Those tired-sounding proverbs.

And sometimes a paragraph that went on for two or three sentences. Maybe even four. Before he started a new one.

Like this.

Tony Parsons' three previous novels, *Man and Boy*, *One for My Baby*, *Man and Wife*, have fallen into a distinct sub-genre, neither lad-lit nor chick-lit but somewhere in between. Laddish-but-sensitive might be one way of putting it, or lad-lit lite. He himself has put it, rather clumsily, as "chick-with-dick-lit". They're about the difficulties faced by men in adjusting to the responsibilities of partnership and parenthood. And the formula works, in commercial terms at least. They fly off the shelves of supermarkets, Smiths and even proper bookshops, in their millions.

One can imagine how the series might have continued, with *Ball and Chain*, *Day In Day Out* and *More of the Same Only Worse*. But Parsons, mindful of the fact that (since most lads don't read lit) his readership is mostly female, has colonised new territory. Mum-lit, perhaps. Or babe-with-baby lit.

The story this time is told from the point of view of three sisters, daughters of a broken home whose own grown-up homes and families are now threatened by the arrival, or non-arrival, of babies. The women are all strong-minded and determined, they think they know what they want. But then, as Parsons keeps reminding us, "everything changes". Except that, as he tells us on the same page, "nothing changes". The ones who don't want babies later decide they do; and the ones who do want them can't. Oh dear.

As we pursue them through their ordeals with unloving or absent parents, cheating partners and disappointing jobs, towards that ultimate and life-affirming goal of motherhood, we may occasionally forget exactly which of the three brave heroines' stories is being narrated; but we are left in no doubt about such matters as contraception, abortion, infertility, sperm tests, pornography, laparoscopy, endometriosis, thrombosis, menopause, IVF, vasectomy, miscarriage, haemorrhage, ultrasonic scans, nuchal scans, invasive tests, pre-eclampsia, Braxton-Hicks contractions, antenatal classes, caesarean section, infant incubation and, well, by now the end is listless. This research is not just regurgitated: it's projectile vomited at you. There's also breastfeeding (problems with) and breast beating (plenty of). There are births in hospital and al fresco. There's an abortion and an adoption. There's a baby born with Down's Syndrome and another with a hole in its heart.

And talking of hearts (at which this book is clearly aimed, rather than minds) the text is littered with cardiac references: there is a "heart of stone" on p58; "stirrings of love in the male heart" on p82; a suspicion "in some secret chamber of his heart" on p176, a "heart raced" on p202, a baby is "heartbreakingly tiny" on p204. Someone is presented, on p215, with a "heart-shaped box of chocolates." Feelings "tugged at his heart" on p311, so that his "heart was no longer his own." There are more secret hearts or chambers of hearts on pp227 and 237. By a daring extension of the metaphor, on p295, "some chunk of ice buried deep inside him began to thaw". (Take cover chaps, he's "exploding with pride".)

When it's not hearts, it's miracles. "We are all miracles," someone thinks on p95. This is soon upgraded to "a walking miracle." But by p191 (and again on p208) the fact of life has become just an "everyday miracle". And when it's not miracles, it's aliens: a baby's first ultrasound scan, on p104, makes it look like "an alien in a snowstorm". This almost poetical image is rather spoiled, on p209, when the baby's caesarean birth is "like a scene from *Alien*".

As you'd expect, there's plenty of Parsons' trademark wit 'n' wisdom (as reflected in the *Mirror*). "Your parents ruin the first half of your life, and your children ruin the second half." "Nobody loves their family more than someone from a broken home." "Children gave you a stake in the future, and they gave you a family." "It doesn't take forty weeks to make you a mother. It takes a lifetime." Terse, trenchant, more than a little trite, they are produced with a flourish in the spirit of proverbs, or even beatitudes, to be mulled over and meditated on.

Some are simply too good not to reheat. "A man doesn't become a mother just because the mother is not around" later reappears as "A father couldn't become a mother simply because the mother had done a runner". And "We want women to be dirty, but we don't want the mother of our children to be dirty" is later rephrased, in non family newspaper lingo, as "If you want to fuck them, then you don't want a baby with them. And if you want a baby with them, then you don't want to fuck them." Too right, Tony.

In short, it's the message, not the story, that Parsons wants ramming home. Tell, don't show, is his watchword. "Tamsin also did her bit to fit her sexual stereotype, clinging to his arm as if he were the hot one, not her, as if a black American Express card was superior to gilded youth. She really was that stupid." And to need that second sentence, so presumably is the reader.

Books & Bookmen

■ ANTHONY "Fatty" Cheetham, publishing's answer to Frank Sinatra, is rumoured to be on the brink of yet another comeback.

It is suggested that he has been eyeing up various independent publishers, including near-moribund Duckworth and the much healthier Constable and Robinson, with a view to a reverse takeover – the tactic he used successfully with Weidenfeld & Nicolson to form Orion 13 years ago.

However, while his past prowess at raising cash and building a company has been beyond doubt, there are questions now over his ability to do it all again. When he was sacked from the then Random Century, he was able to take his top lieutenants to Orion, such as his then-wife Rosie de Courcy, sales director Dallas Manderson, paperback supremo Susan Lamb and financial director Peter Roche. All except de Courcy remain at Orion doing very nicely for themselves (Roche has Cheetham's old job) and the absence of Cheetham's often abrasive manner doesn't seem to be harming the company's fortunes.

So it's unlikely any of them would so willing to stick their head in the lion's mouth once again, with the result that Fatty will be all on his tod at his new venture.

■ REVIEWING Michael Barber's *Anthony Powell: a Life* in the *Daily Telegraph* on 3 July, Hilary Spurling was pretty scathing.

"Little fresh insight and no surprises," she complained, dismissing the biography's "bland, reductive tone" and "simplistic judgements" before recalling that for Powell, being interviewed by Barber was "a horrible experience".

All of which is fair enough in a purely objective review. So no doubt it was only lack of space which prevented Spurling from declaring an interest — as the author of a rival (indeed the "official") biography of Powell.

■ THE BBC adaptation of Jake Arnott's debut novel *The Long Firm* has been one of the highlights of the summer TV schedules, if that isn't to damn it with faint praise.

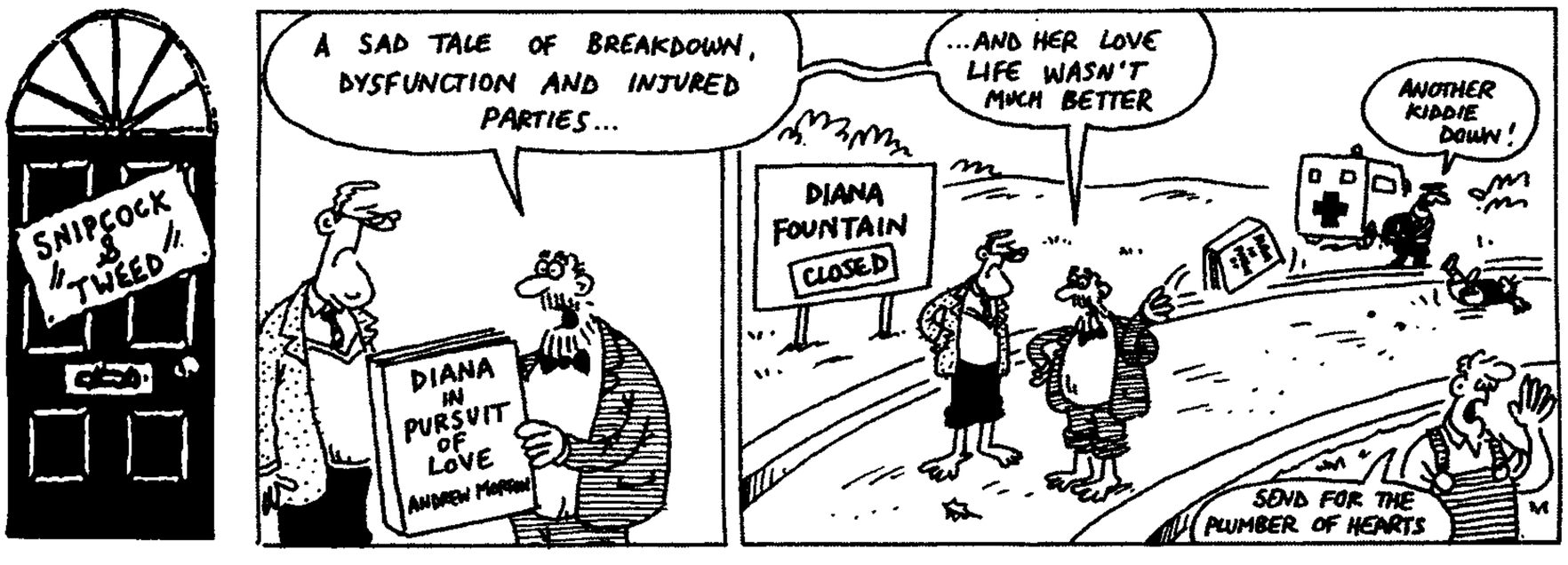
However, the corporation has been sitting on the TV rights since before the book was published – indeed, the TV version is trailed on the back cover of proof copies of the book, sent out in early 1999. So much for "Making It Happen".

■ OVER in New York Richard Goldstein of the *Village Voice* has observed that Rupert Murdoch has been going easy on Michael Moore.

While rival networks ABC (prop: Disney, which needs to remain on good terms with the government and its regulators) and NBC (prop: General Electric, one of the US's main defence contractors) have both weighed in with a series of attacks on Moore and his latest film *Fahrenheit 9/11*, the worst complaint made by hacks at Murdoch's Fox network has been that he won't grant them an interview.

Meanwhile, Rupe's *New York Post* printed a strange editorial defending Moore against the federal election commission, which has problems with some advertisements placed by the larger-than-life polemicist. Why so friendly? Richard Goldstein of the *Village Voice* suggests that "Murdoch is covering his ass in case John Kerry wins". Unfortunately Goldstein seems not to have noticed that HarperCollins – also owned by Murdoch – has just published *Michael Moore Is A Big Fat Stupid White Man*, which purports to be an exposé of Moore's "lies".

'Bookworm'


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
A SAD TALE OF BREAKDOWN, DYSFUNCTION AND INJURED PARTIES...
DIANA IN PURSUIT OF LOVE
ANDREW MARTIN
...AND HER LOVE LIFE WASN'T MUCH BETTER
DIANA FOUNTAIN
CLOSED
ANOTHER KIDDIE DOWN!
SEND FOR THE PLUMBER OF HEARTS

SUMMER READING IN THE EYE

Our panel of celebrity critics reveal what they'll be packing for the beach...

Rose Tremain
Novelist

The failure of my friend Caroline Moorhead's *Martha Gellhorn: A Life* (Vintage) to win one of the year's literary prizes is a truly shocking indictment of the parlous state of contemporary literature, its cliques, alliances and oversights, and one that fills me with passionate disquiet.

Hugh Massingberd
Writer and journalist

Though warmly appreciative of the delicate suffusions of light cast by Michael Barber in his agreeable biography *Anthony Powell: A Life* (Duckworth), I was, I must confess, alarmed by the comparatively casual approach brought to his treatment of the subject's Welsh ancestry. There was nothing in the least bogus about this. As the remote descendant of Cadwallader Rhys ap-Hywel of Llandridnod Wells, and through his grandmother, Lady Helen Llewellyn, a connexion of the celebrated Radnorshire squire Sir John Stradling-Taff (see *Genealogica Cambriensis*, vol. XXIII) Powell was thoroughly justified in regarding himself as... [*continues*]

Craig Raine
Poet and critic

A few refreshing trifles. Homer. Proust. Dante. That kind of thing.

Alain de Botton
Writer and philosopher

As my friend James Delingpole doesn't seem to have a book out this year I really don't know what to recommend.

D.J. Taylor
Novelist and critic

I don't suppose that the little-known Victorian society poet Silenus Dull is much read these days. This is a pity, for his *Lines Written on the Steps of the Reform Club while watching Mr Gladstone offer Succour to a Lady of the Night* is a classic of its kind. I was delighted then to come across Professor Endymion Beard's *Dull: Forgotten Cadences* (University of North Staffordshire Press, £150) which makes out a convincing case for its subject's centrality to that enticing group of mid-19th century poets known as the Putney Rhymesters, one of whose meetings, Professor Beard tantalisingly reveals, would have been attended by Mrs Emily Tennyson, had she not been suffering from chilblains on the night in question.

A.C. Grayling
Philosopher

I confess that I should have been ravished by the altogether ravishing *Courtesans* (Flamingo) even had it not been a product of the no less ravishing pen of my partner Katie Hickman. Elsewhere, I was impressed by the sweet reason, impeccable logic and good humour brought by that great American scholar Rhoda-Joe Hackensack to her *Stop Digging Up My Green Tomatoes, God: An Atheist's Garden* (Bigot Press £3.99) which shows beyond all reasonable doubt that all followers of organised religion should be hung by their heels and tortured to death.

Zoe Heller
Writer and journalist

Jimmy Joyce, Billy Faulkner and Ernie Hemingway sound like this girl's cup of lapsang souchong for the summer semester, methinks.

Andrew Roberts
Historian

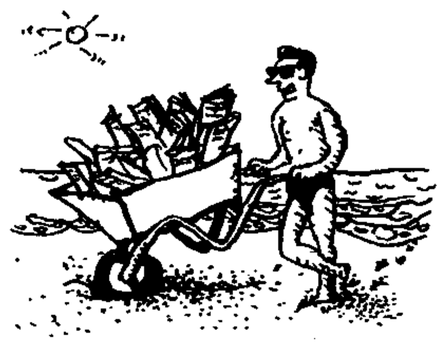
Revisionist studies of 20th century Conservatism have tended to overlook the achievements of the party's aristocratic wing, and so it was with delight that I turned to *They Also Serve* (Patrician Press, £395), Tarquin de Toffe's magisterial biography of the Hon. Tristan Carruthers, Chamberlain's Minister for Bridleways between March and April 1939. As the son of the Marquis of Clantantrum, and a nephew by marriage of the celebrated Mayfair hostess Laetitia Fang, Carruthers was placed by birth and upbringing at the very centre of the *monde haute politique*. His subsequent remark to the Prime Minister on hearing of the fall of Crete ("I suppose this is what comes of having been to Harrow, eh Winston?") reveals him to have been possessed of a sprightly wit that... [*continues*]

Philip Hensher
Novelist and critic

A really outstanding year for literary biography. In particular Peter Parker's life of the 30s novelist Esme Lisp struck me as quite staggering, an argument not only for books, art and homosexuality but for the creation of the world itself.

Paul Johnson
Historian and columnist

Alas, the most pressing and extravagant demands of publishers and editors and, dare I say it, the lure of agreeable luncheons have inhibited my sorties to the coal face of our literature of late, and I shall, perforce, be accompanied to Tuscany only by the proofs of my forthcoming study, *The World: What's Wrong and How to Set it Right*.



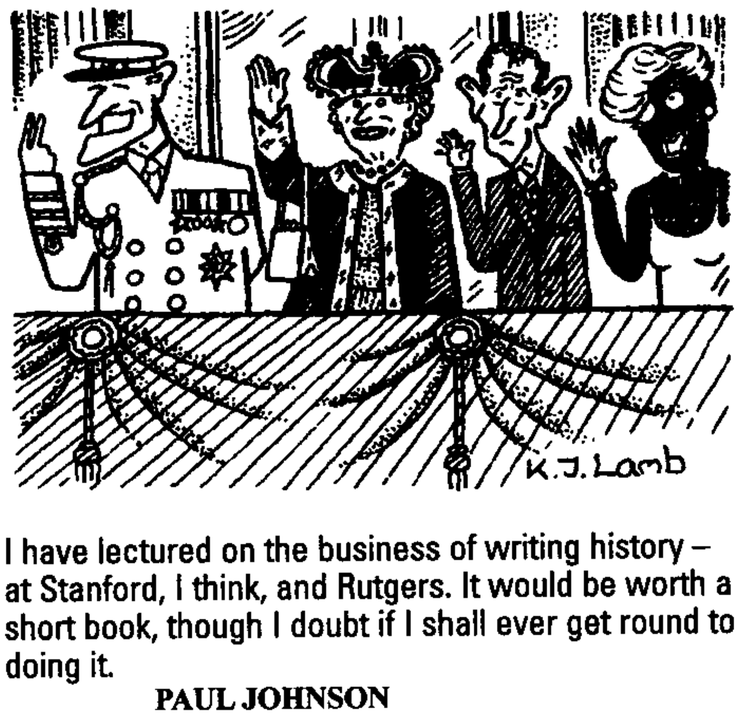
FIRST DRAFTS

Harold Pinter

Pseuds Corner

She [Diana, Princess of Wales] was the black person in the Royal Family.

BONNIE GREER
Guardian



I have lectured on the business of writing history – at Stanford, I think, and Rutgers. It would be worth a short book, though I doubt if I shall ever get round to doing it.

PAUL JOHNSON
Spectator

It was while removing a particularly adhesive smear of Camembert from the two fluttering birds on a willow-pattern plate that I first understood Beethoven's Grosse Fuge.

ROGER SCRUTON
The Times

On her wrist she wears black sea pearls ("the orphan pearls that get left behind," as she puts it) and two gold bangles. She bought these in Istanbul to replace two bangles that Matt, her ex-boyfriend, had given her, after they broke up. Because, as she explains to me, complete with an enthusiastic mime, "It wouldn't be right to be giving someone a handjob wearing bangles another man had given you." In her own way, Emin is a true romantic.

JESS CARTNER-MORLEY profiles TRACEY EMIN
Guardian

[Private chef] Skye Gyngel is similarly close to many of her clients, in particular the model Laura Bailey who, along with her boyfriend Eric Fellner of Working Title Films, hosts a supper every Monday in their Notting Hill home. "I've really watched Laura grow as a hostess," says Skye. "She dresses up for dinner and lays the most beautiful table. And there are always cocktails before dinner, another lovely touch."

Observer

Pseuds Corporate

Dear Mr Barnes,
I am sorry to hear about the difficulties experienced by you while accessing the emails of your BT Yahoo! Account after the recent upgrade. I apologise for the inconvenience caused.
I understand that the advertisement windows are obstructing the view of incoming emails and you are unable to use the delete button. Please be assured that I am escalating this interaction to the concerned department for initiating proactive approaches on improving this feature.

The BT Yahoo! Internet team responds to a customer complaint

When Ruth Healy left a high-flying job in sales and marketing to set up her own business, she made a major lifestyle change, which lies behind Urru, the title of her culinary store. Urru stands for urban to rural, and is deliberately palindromic, as the traffic is both ways.

ALLANAH HOPKIN
Irish Times Magazine

CONTRIBUTORS: A.Lyons, John Mardaljevic, Conor McNamara, S.Hamilton, Ben Sheppard, Allan Barnes, Stephen Crane.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

MAPELEY STEPS

ANOTHER FALSE DAWN

LABOUR backbencher Denzil Davies has been asking paymaster-general "Red" Dawn Primarolo some very pertinent questions about the Mapeley Steps private finance initiative (PFI) deal, under which all Inland Revenue and Customs offices were sold to a company in Bermuda three years ago (see *Eyes passim*).

In June, as reported in *Eye* 1110, Davies extracted the information that payments to Mapeley are averaging £307m a year, against the £170m standard annual payment, known as the "facility price", shown in the national audit office's (NAO) report on the deal the month before.

With the *Eye*'s encouragement Davies has now gone back to find out why there was such a large discrepancy. Primarolo's answer to his latest question on 19 July revealed that, incredibly for an organisation which demands that taxpayers keep business records for many years, the Revenue could not obtain details for 2001/02 and 2002/03. For 2003/04, however, she said that on top of the facility price there were other payments (mainly for utilities and building work) totalling £63m.

Together with the predicted facility price of £170m, this would have made total payments for the year of £233m. But comparing this figure with the total given in the paymaster-general's answer just a month earlier reveals a glaring inconsistency. In 2003/04 the government shelled out £309m, meaning that the facility price payments to Mapeley in the last year must have been £246m, which is £76m more than the £170m accepted unquestioningly by the NAO. If there were this difference every year (and what can be seen of the total payments for the first three years gives no reason to suggest there won't be), the contract would end up costing around £1.5bn more than predicted over its 20-year life.

The NAO report shows that the STEPS PFI deal was estimated to be only £300m cheaper than the "public sector comparator" (which itself was not scrutinised by the NAO). The discrepancies exposed by Denzil Davies suggest that this PFI contract may turn out to be significantly more expensive than the rejected alternative of keeping the country's tax offices in the public sector rather than in the ownership of a tax haven company.

When the *Observer* reported Davies's most recent questions on 25 July, it got the wrong end of the stick and assumed that the additional payments were the £63m for services not covered by the facility price. This enabled a Revenue spokesman to dismiss the paper's inquiries by pointing out that such payments were to be expected. What is *not* to be expected in a PFI deal like this, however, is that the basic facility price should increase so dramatically as soon as the contract is signed.

Davies may now want to ask Red Dawn some more pertinent questions, including: 1) Why was the facility payment £76m greater than the national audit office accepted it would be? 2) How were any extra payments in this and earlier years related to the fact that seven months after signing the deal, Mapeley found itself threatened with insolvency and came cap in hand to the Revenue for more money?

PS: Other interesting facts obtained by questions from Davies and fellow Labour MP Jim Cousins include the government's use of 42 firms of external consultants and advisers on the STEPS deal, including arch-tax avoiders Ernst & Young and Deloitte & Touche, at a cost to taxpayers up to April 2004 of £13.4m.

MMR

Keith and smiles?

THE high court judge conducting the multi-million pound MMR lawsuit has criticised the legal service commission (LSC) for the way it suddenly withdrew legal aid funding for the children at the centre of case. It was "hardly an advertisement for access to justice", Mr Justice Keith said last week.

The removal of funds left the parents high and dry, without any proper legal advice about the consequences of continuing or abandoning their five-year-old claims against the three defendant drug companies.

About 15 parents, all with severely disabled children, turned up to represent themselves at a two-day hearing last week — less than the combined ranks of QCs, junior counsel and solicitors representing the drug companies.

It emerged that they were damned if they did continue and damned if they didn't. If they battled on without legal aid, they risked losing their homes in costs to the drug companies should the case ultimately fail. But if they abandoned the struggle, they not only forfeited the chance to appeal the withdrawal of legal aid, they could also be liable for the hefty costs bill clocked up since their certificates were revoked in June.

Worse, from their point of view, they may face insurmountable legal barriers to ever resurrecting their claims, should a new piece of scientific evidence come to light or public funding be restored.

Mr Justice Keith was very concerned that none of this was ever properly explained to the families when around 600 agreed to discontinue their legal actions — most in order to take advantage of a "costs amnesty" offered them by the drugs companies, Smithkline, Merck and Aventis Pasteur. What was clear from several in court who had discontinued was that they had done so reluctantly only because of the costs threat and believing they would be able to come back to court at a later stage, should science or funding change.

The result of last week's hearing is a compromise which at least buys the families a little time, until mid October, to appeal the legal aid ruling if they wish and to reconsider their decisions over continuing or dropping out of the litigation.

Mr Justice Keith said that although it was not his job to question the decision of the commission to withdraw funding, everyone's task would have been easier if it had at least made some provision to help parents reach an informed decision. "No one could fail to have enormous sympathy for the parents, who had spoken eloquently and with great feeling of the tragedies which befell them when their children became ill," he said.

The trouble is that the families do not want sympathy. They want their cases examined publicly and independently — either by a court or an inquiry. They complain that the legal service commission has "played judge and jury".

Further new science is emerging all the time, which may ultimately answer the question and either clear or condemn the triple vaccine. For example, three groups of scientists, two in the US and one in Switzerland, are expected to report later this year on their attempts to replicate the Wakefield findings of vaccine strain measles virus in the diseased bowels of the autistic children. It would seem a huge injustice to these families to rule their cases out prematurely – but that must now be a possibility.

NHS SUPERBUGS

Where there's MRSA there's brass

TONY BLAIR's sinister health secretary John Reid has deflected criticism about MRSA with a sprinkle of "new" Labour gimmicks. While the national audit office (NAO) described the NHS response to the superbug killing 5,000 a year as "patchy", Reid suggested that patient "hotlines" and a commitment to "fly in" unnamed foreign "experts" would solve the problem.

One point not mentioned by Reid is that the number of cleaners has halved as the service has been privatised over the past 15 years, leaving dirty hospitals more vulnerable to superbugs. But might his omission be related to the fact that the NHS's shrinking army of ill-paid cleaners is employed by firms run by the kind of rich businessmen so admired by his government?

Hospitals are a captive market with five firms controlling more than half of NHS cleaning. Even with this limited choice, the NAO showed that 16 percent of NHS trusts do not even consult their infection-control nurses about their cleaning contracts, and 20 percent only "sometimes" consult them. The five firms are ISS Mediclean, Sodexho, Compass, Rentokil Initial and OCS.

While Eric Rylberg, boss of Denmark's ISS, struggles by on £607,839 a year, his cleaners in Swansea hospitals are currently preparing to strike after ISS sacked union rep Graham Davies, apparently for his union activities. Davies was heavily involved in strikes in 2002, when ISS cleaners in Swansea, Lanarkshire and London walked out to push their wages up to a princely £4.62 an hour.

Sodexho's boss Michel Landel makes do with £562,639 a year. His firm is better known for hospital catering than cleaning: in June this year it tried unsuccessfully to stop Channel 4's *Despatches* broadcasting an investigation into "unhygienic behaviour" in its hospital meal supply business. But the cleaning businesses have also hit the headlines: in 2002 Sodexho pulled out of a contract at Glasgow's Victoria Infirmary following an MRSA outbreak.

Compass chairman Francis McKay, who earned a knighthood from Tony Blair last year, also earned £1,259,000 plus £549,582 in share options. Compass has not faced serious industrial action since last year, when a strike ballot forced the firm to increase healthcare pay in Tower Hamlets to £5.16 an hour.

Sir Clive Thompson left Rentokil this year after poor performance. His Initial cleaners at Barnsley General voted overwhelmingly for a strike in January, protesting at measly pay and slashed staff numbers. Sir Clive's firm gave in and pushed up their pay from £4.50 an hour to a full £4.75. However, they would still have to work seven days a week for 32 years to earn Sir Clive's £445,000 pay-off.

OCS is a family-owned firm that makes chief executive Jim Goodliffe the 369th richest man in Britain. Earlier this year staff at Neath Port Talbot Hospital threatened strike action over staff shortages, complaining that numbers "are just insufficient to keep the hospital clean". They called off the walk-out when OCS promised to increase staff by 10 percent.

But let's not be unfair. On 12 July health secretary Reid revealed another of his ingenious beat-the-superbugs plans: "I will ask local patients' forums to conduct cleanliness inspections four times a year, using a checklist drawn up by infection control nurses, and the results will be made public."

On 22 July, he then announced the abolition of the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health — the organisation created to set up and run the patient forums!

JOBS FOR THE BOYS

BIGGLES FILLS HIS POCKETS

ONE legacy of the Tory "sleaze" era is the advisory committee on business appointments, set up to police the "revolving door" that takes ministers and senior officials so smoothly from public positions to lucrative private contracts. But its days may now be numbered thanks to Tony Blair's zeal for greater "interchange" between the public and private sectors.

Proof of his mounting impatience came last week in the remarkable revelation, tucked away in the committee's latest report, that Blair personally overruled the official anti-sleaze watchdog in favour of arms firm BAE Systems. The case involved a very senior RAF officer, Air Chief Marshal Sir John Day (*right*), who wanted to leave the services and work as a military adviser to BAE Systems, one of the RAF's main suppliers.

Although "sympathetic" to his request, the committee believed that following "normal propriety principles" there should still be a gap of one year between Sir John's retirement from Whitehall and the start of his new job. It pointed out that Sir John was "involved with air force board decisions that would have a direct bearing on the MoD's business with the company".

This was too much for the Dear Leader. The committee noted that "the prime minister decided, exceptionally, that there was a wider national interest in permitting Air Chief Marshal Day to take up his appointment earlier than we had proposed." To the prime minister, it seems, the "national interest" is synonymous with the interests of BAE Systems.

As the committee records, Sir John was joined by a throng of other top brass whizzing through the revolving door. Sir Robert Walmsley, chief executive of the MoD's defence procurement agency, became a director of giant American arms firm General Dynamics and of Stratos, a firm supplying military satellites to the MoD. His deputy at defence procurement, John Howe, became vice-chairman of the French warship and warplane maker Thales. (MPs on the defence select committee recently described the defence procurement agency as "woeful" in its dealings with arms companies.)

Vice-admiral Sir Jeremy Blackham, a deputy chief of defence staff with responsibilities for equipment, took a top job with European warplane maker EADS. Blackham also became a director of a new management consultancy called Altmaana, which chases MoD work (and which had already hired a colleague of Blackham's, Major Nick Brittam). Blackham was allowed to take up the jobs as long as he asked for permission to work on contracts for battlefield helicopters and other kit on sale to the army.

Other senior figures who have joined private defence companies in the past two years include Air Marshal Christopher Colville, First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Nigel Essenhigh, General Sir Rupert Smith, Lieutenant General Sir Anthony Piggott and Admiral Sir Peter Abbott — who became a consultant to Bechtel, the US engineer which would love to get its hands on some UK naval contracts.

The advisory committee is clearly worried at the exodus of MoD staff to work for arms firms. "It can be argued that the numbers seeking such employment are so significant as to amount to a 'traffic' from the department to the defence contractors who supply it. It could be supposed that such officers might enter their final postings with a hope or expectation of post-retirement employment with the companies with which they were dealing officially."

The watchdog was "inclined in such cases to make rather tougher recommendations than previously". However, the MoD and Blair intervened to argue that, while the armed forces struggle with ever more expensive kit from these suppliers, such "traffic" is actually a good thing.

The committee's report was published on 22 July. On the same day, irritated beyond endurance by its "propriety principles", Tony Blair asked Sir Patrick Brown to review the rules governing business appointments — "to ensure that they are compatible with a public service that is keen to encourage greater interchange with the private and other sectors which is essential for effective delivery in today's public service". With those terms of reference, there are no prizes for guessing what Blair wants: more and faster revolving doors. And no doubt Sir Patrick will be happy to oblige: he's a former permanent secretary at the ministry of transport who now runs… a large private rail and bus company, the Go-Ahead Group plc.

KIDS IN JAIL

Blunkett's Britain

YVONNE SCHOLES is a single mother and full-time carer to her 16-year-old son Jack, who has a rare genetic disease. Not surprisingly, Mrs Scholes is dependent on benefits; and in April she had to arrange special care for Jack when she travelled from her home in Clwyd to Shrewsbury to attend the two-week inquest in to the death of her other son, Joseph, who just weeks after his 16th birthday had hanged himself in Stoke Heath young offenders' jail.

Mrs Scholes only managed to pay for her budget hotel, food and travel costs with the help of her daughter, who accompanied her. She anticipated that she would be reimboursed by the home office, which at the time of Joseph's death was responsible for his "care" (or lack of it).

But the home office declined to cough up, saying Mrs Scholes had suffered "no hardship". Inquest, the campaign group which investigates deaths in custody, describes this decision as "shameful". And so it is when one considers that the bills for the entire home office and prison service team, who stayed in one of Shewsbury's nicer hotels while attending the inquest, were met by taxpayers.

The mean treatment of Mrs Scholes is not the only shocking thing about the case. Her son's inquest revealed how appallingly children are treated in British jails. Indeed, coroner John Ellery was so disturbed by the catalogue of failure revealed that he took the unprecedented step of writing to home secretary David Blunkett calling for a public inquiry.

Joseph Scholes was a vulnerable and traumatised teenager, the victim of sexual abuse, who was sentenced to two years for having been on the periphery of a group from his care home who had been caught stealing mobile phones. Readers may recall that two weeks before he was sentenced, Joseph slashed his face 30 times. Nine days after his sentence, he hanged himself.

Every health and justice professional agreed that prison was the last place such a vulnerable child, with a history of depression, suicidal tendencies and self harm, should have been sent. In the words of one expert, Joseph was "more victim than offender". Nor was he helped by being in the health wing at Stoke Heath, where he died. An independent inspector said the wing would have been shut down had it been in a children's home. But Joseph had the misfortune to come to court just as ministers and the lord chief justice announced a crackdown on mobile phone theft.

While calling for a public inquiry, coroner Ellery said that sentencing policy was not in his remit but that it had played a part in the chain of events that led to Joseph's death. Ellery's inquiry call was taken up by 66 MPs from all parties who signed an early-day motion in June. Last month Joseph's case was also raised at the Church of England general synod in York, where bishops condemned Britain's treatment of "children in trouble with the law" and the "suffering and injustice meted out to them".

The continuing use of prison for record numbers of children – currently more than 3,000 – has long concerned prison inspectors and United Nations human rights groups. But the home office has so far declined an inquiry; and under home secretary Blunkett, who is determined to prove he has something more of the night about him than even Michael Howard, it's unlikely to change its mind.

CARE HOMES

Bupa blooper

BUPA finally seems to be getting to grips with the serious problems relating to the care of old people that have dogged Isard House care home in Bromley, Kent, for the last five years.

Since the last *Eye* appeared, more staff at the home have been suspended or sacked amid allegations of mistreatment and neglect. Following the arrival of a "hit squad" from Bupa, investigations are continuing and more disciplinary action is expected.

One sacked careworker is understood to have been one of those whom Bupa relied on five years ago to defend itself against claims from seven whistleblowers of serious abuse and neglect in the home, which caters for up to 66 old people with high levels of dependency. It was alleged that residents had been left in their own mess, were handled roughly and inappropriately drugged.

More recently, reports from the new Commission for Social Care Inspection have failed to spot the issues currently at the centre of allegations at the home; but the commission has found that the home has consistently failed to reach even minimum standards in care needs and training. It also expressed concern about high numbers of falls and accidents requiring emergency hospital treatment.

Yesterday Bupa declined to give any details of the latest allegations but said it was continuing to investigate "concerns raised by staff". "To date, five members of staff have been suspended, five disciplinary hearings are due to take place, one staff member has been dismissed and one has been given a written warning."

Eileen Chubb (*above*), one of the original whistleblowers who now runs a charity called Compassion in Care, said: "The trouble is that by denying and fighting our claims five years ago, Bupa sent the wrong message to the core of the staff. Because of that it seems nothing has really changed."

She may be right. Advertisements have already appeared in the local paper for an unspecified number of both senior and junior care workers, full and part-time. Phoning up to inquire about a job as a senior care worker, an *Eye* reporter was offered an immediate interview. She was not asked about any previous experience, qualifications or whether she had a criminal record – all mentioned as areas of concern in the last inspection report.

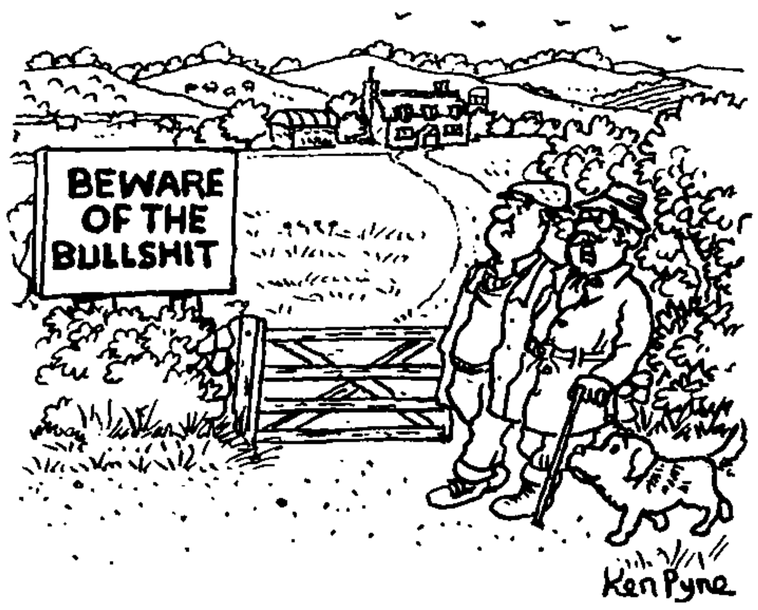
You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

HERE is some much needed good news for the 40,000 current and future pensioners of US-based Federal-Mogul's main British subsidiary, the asbestos-riddled Turner & Newall, who face either the loss of half or a frozen pension as a result of an £875m hole in the company pension fund. The bean counter who helped bring such a disaster closer (by halting employee contributions to the fund) has just become a multi-millionaire; and his financial benefits have been considerably enhanced with an increased salary, bonuses and share options, plus a million-dollar golden "hello".

So while T&N pension fund members worry about their future, there are no such concerns at insolvency practitioners Kroll Buchler Phillips for accountant Simon Freakley, administrator for the Federal-Mogul companies, following the $1.9bn takeover of the accountant's American parent Kroll by insurance group Marsh & McLennan.

Freakley heads Kroll's worldwide corporate advisory and restructuring division, which has grown to become far more important as a profit earner than the corporate sleuthery that made the Kroll name. Tipped for the top, Freakley is the only non-American Kroll director.



"I hear it's another farm bought by a suit from the City"

Since 2001 he has also been administrator for Federal-Mogul's UK companies. The US car parts group was forced into Chapter XI proceedings to protect itself from its creditors as a result of the tidal wave of asbestosis-related litigation faced by T&N, which it acquired in 1997.

As part of the M&M deal agreed in May, Freakley has been rewarded with a three-year contract worth a basic £750,000 a year, with a minimum target bonus of a further £450,000. He was also awarded share options worth £1.1m exercisable in three years. And as a final sweetener there was a golden "hello" signing bonus of £550,000. Not that Freakley exactly missed out on the goodies showered on Kroll shareholders by M & M. His near 150,000 Kroll shares were worth just over £3m cash on the bid.

The T&N pension crisis has arisen because creditors of Federal-Mogul, which is also advised by Kroll, have refused to top up the pension fund provoking a battle with its trustees. Failure to reach a settlement influenced Freakley to ask the high court last month to approve a halt to contributions and move 2,500 employees into a new fund. This was designed to protect existing employees but could prove disastrous for remaining T&N scheme members, including 20,000 pensioners. However, even Federal-Mogul described the move as "unusual" and "unsettling" for its employees. Federal-Mogul maintains it wants to continue paying into the fund.

T&N pension fund members rank behind secured creditors such as banks. The huge liabilities of the pension fund are clearly a major hurdle to any plan for Federal-Mogul to emerge from administration or Chapter XI. So the answer is simple. Walk away from those liabilities. A number of foreign-owned British companies have done exactly that in the past four years since the stock market collapse exposed the pension deficits caused by under-funding, past pension contribution holidays and new accounting rules. Already some 60,000 workers are victims of company-underfunded pension funds wound up often by solvent companies.

If there is no substantial cash injection the Freakley move is likely to lead to the T&N fund also being wound up by the trustees, thereby crystallising the up to £875m shortfall leaving its present and future pensioners with frozen or halved pensions.

This would almost certainly trigger a call on the still-not-in-place rescue fund set up by the government. But the T&N pensioners could overwhelm the £400m pension protection fund and force the taxpayer to pick up the tab. This at a time when Federal-Mogul in the US could successfully emerge from Chapter XI leaving the UK taxpayer with the pension bill for its British subsidiaries.

In the past three years the insolvency/corporate recovery side of Kroll has become all-important, quietly overtaking the corporate investigation division which garners all the gushing business page profiles from Philip Marlowe wannabes. Corporate restructuring revenues grew from $31m in 2001 to $160m last year, whereas the consulting services division, which bundles together the Kroll PIs with several other specialities, grew only from $106m to $131m. Whereas in 2001 consulting services made more than half the group's money, last year it made only 27 percent. Freakley and friends for the first time became the biggest money earners, generating a third of the Kroll revenues and producing profits of $93m compared with $59m from the consultancy side.

This changeover began when Kroll purchased Lindquist Avey in Canada and then, in 1999, the Buchler Phillips insolvency business where Freakley was a senior partner. But the big change came in 2002 when it acquired Zolfo Cooper of New York which became involved in restructuring Enron. The stock market crash and economic downturn in the US and Europe has meant boom times for the insolvency/restructuring experts as Simon Freakley's ever-increasing good fortunes have shown. The 40,000 T&N pension fund members will be forgiven if they do not celebrate.

But if all is well on the corporate recovery side, there are serious problems looming from Kroll's traditional business. A warrant has been issued in Brazil for the arrest of a Kroll operative, Briton William Goodall, who escaped back to London just ahead of the local police. Brazilian-based operative and former Kroll employee Thiago Verdial was less fortunate. He has been arrested following allegations of telephone tapping and accessing private financial records — both illegal activities.

Goodall and Verdial were working for Kroll, who had been hired by Brasil Telecom and its biggest shareholder, Brazilian investment company Opportunity. Brasil Telecom and Opportunity have been engaged in a four-year battle to see off Telecom Italia. Brazilian newspapers have published documents which suggest that Kroll spied on the Brazilian communications secretary Luiz Gushiken, before he joined the government, Cassio Casseb, president of state-owned Banco do Brasil, and an ex-Opportunity partner, looking for contacts with the Italian company. Emails and tax records are said to have been obtained as well as telephones tapped.

The two private detectives are said to have been working outside the main Kroll operation in Rio or the regional office in Miami and reporting back to New York through Kroll in Italy and London. Just who knew what about what they were doing from 2000 to 2003 is now of prime importance to the Brazilian authorities and Telecom Italia which has commenced proceedings against Kroll and Brasil Telecom officials.

There is also speculation about whether similar tactics have been used in Kroll's role chasing the missing Parmalat billions. The Italian food group had large loss-making operations in Brazil which were a key element in Europe's biggest ever fraud.

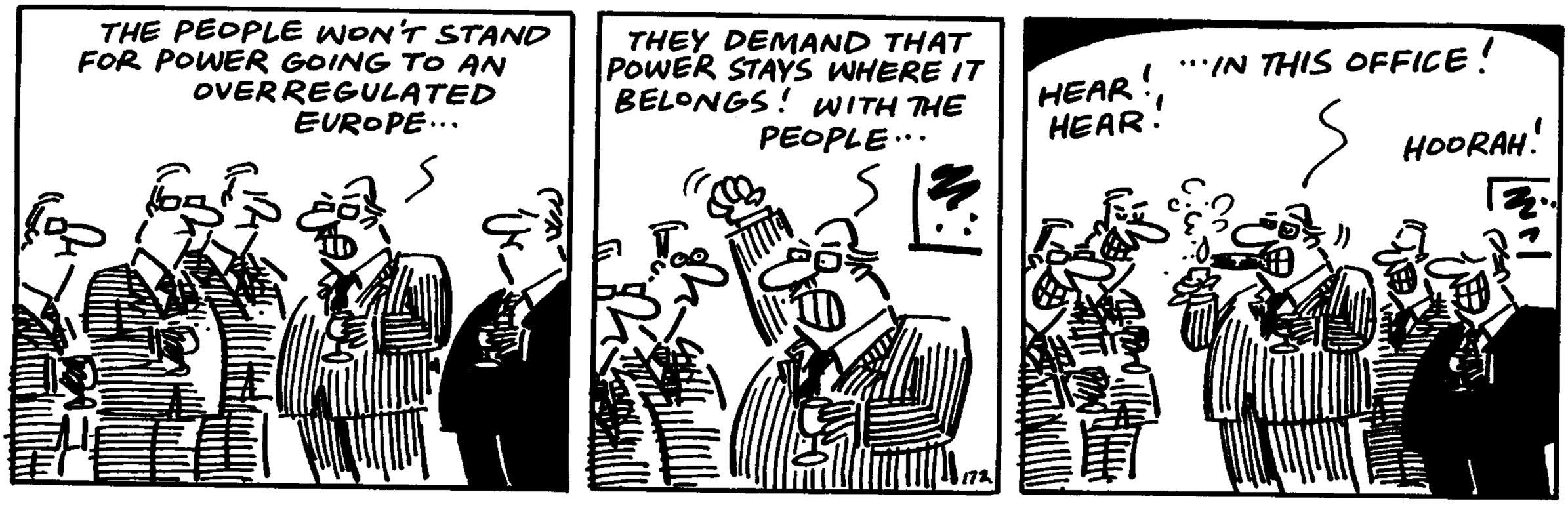
Kroll totally denies that it engaged in any unlawful activities. But then it would, wouldn't it? That is the reason organisations like Kroll employ sub-contractors like Goodall and Verdial. They have what the CIA calls "deniability" if anything goes wrong. Over-enthusiasm, failure to follow company procedures, ignoring clear orders, imagine our surprise, etc, are all available alibis if the balloon goes up.

Such as happened in Geneva more than 10 years ago when Kroll operative Chris Clark was caught trying to access the financial secrets of Saddam Hussein and his half-brother Barzan al-Tikriti. Then Kroll was acting for the Kuwaiti government. South African Clark was arrested but kept his mouth firmly shut and was released after a spell in custody.

Kroll will be hoping Verdial is made of the

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG


THE PEOPLE WON'T STAND FOR POWER GOING TO AN OVERREGULATED EUROPE...
THEY DEMAND THAT POWER STAYS WHERE IT BELONGS! WITH THE PEOPLE...
172
HEAR! HEAR!
...IN THIS OFFICE!
HOORAH!

same stern stuff as Clark. However, Verdial may not have been encouraged by Kroll's Latin American managing director saying that "we don't know what Thiago does with his free time" and that any illegality had not been on behalf of Kroll.

If Verdial contradicts the Kroll official version there could be embarrassment and executive suite fall-out. Meanwhile Goodall will be hoping the very deniability his role provides does not result in the sudden distancing which has happened to Verdial and other Kroll operatives in the past when things went wrong.

The Brazilian caper, combined with a recent incident in Switzerland where Kroll contractors were accused of putting a prosecutor under surveillance and were obliged to apologise, may make M&M wonder what exactly it has bought.

But then the insurance-broking giant has its own problems. It is currently under investigation over commissions and conflicts of interest by the scourge of Wall Street, New York state attorney-general Eliot Spitzer. M&M has already had to pay $110m to settle claims brought against its Putnam Investments mutual funds group by Spitzer. It might perhaps help that Spitzer is an old friend of Kroll chief executive Michael Cherkasky. They worked together in the early 90s in the Manhattan district attorney's office when Cherkasky was the younger Spitzer's boss.

NOBODY can ever accuse the Nigerians behind the endless "open your bank account and say after me, take it all" scams of not being up with the news.

A recent email from a supposed Sudanese refugee delightfully named Jolly Umar now in the Netherlands requests help to release $2.3m currently held in a local security company which somehow was supposed to feed the cattle of her dead father killed last month by the Janjaweed militia. You are promised a 23 percent cut for use of your bank account to receive the money which will make Jolly even jollier when she instead empties your account.

Meanwhile from South Africa Patrika Kovac has £15m sitting in a local bank belonging to the state-besieged Russian oil giant Yukos which needs a home in return for a 27 percent payment. Law enforcement agencies keep making arrests but the "419" beat just goes on and on.

FOLLOWERS of the Chelsea Tsar Roman Abramovich observed his attendance at Euro 2004 and have noted his homes in Britain and yacht in the Med, but they wonder how often the Sibneft boss visits his native Russia these days.

Is there a concern that he might suffer the fate of rival oligarchs enriched from state assets like Vladimir Guzinsky (arrested twice but now free in Israel after selling most of his assets to President Putin's allies) or Yukos's still jailed Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who may need to make a similar deal?

Perhaps he has taken advice from his mentor Boris Berezovsky, who left ahead of the police but has had to fight off an attempt at extradition. Will the Chelsea boss, like Boris, seek British citizenship as a victim of economic and political persecution? As Sibneft has done nothing illegal, surely such concerns are unnecessary and Abramovich visits Russia all the time with no problem.

THERE is no news like old news at the *Sunset Times*.

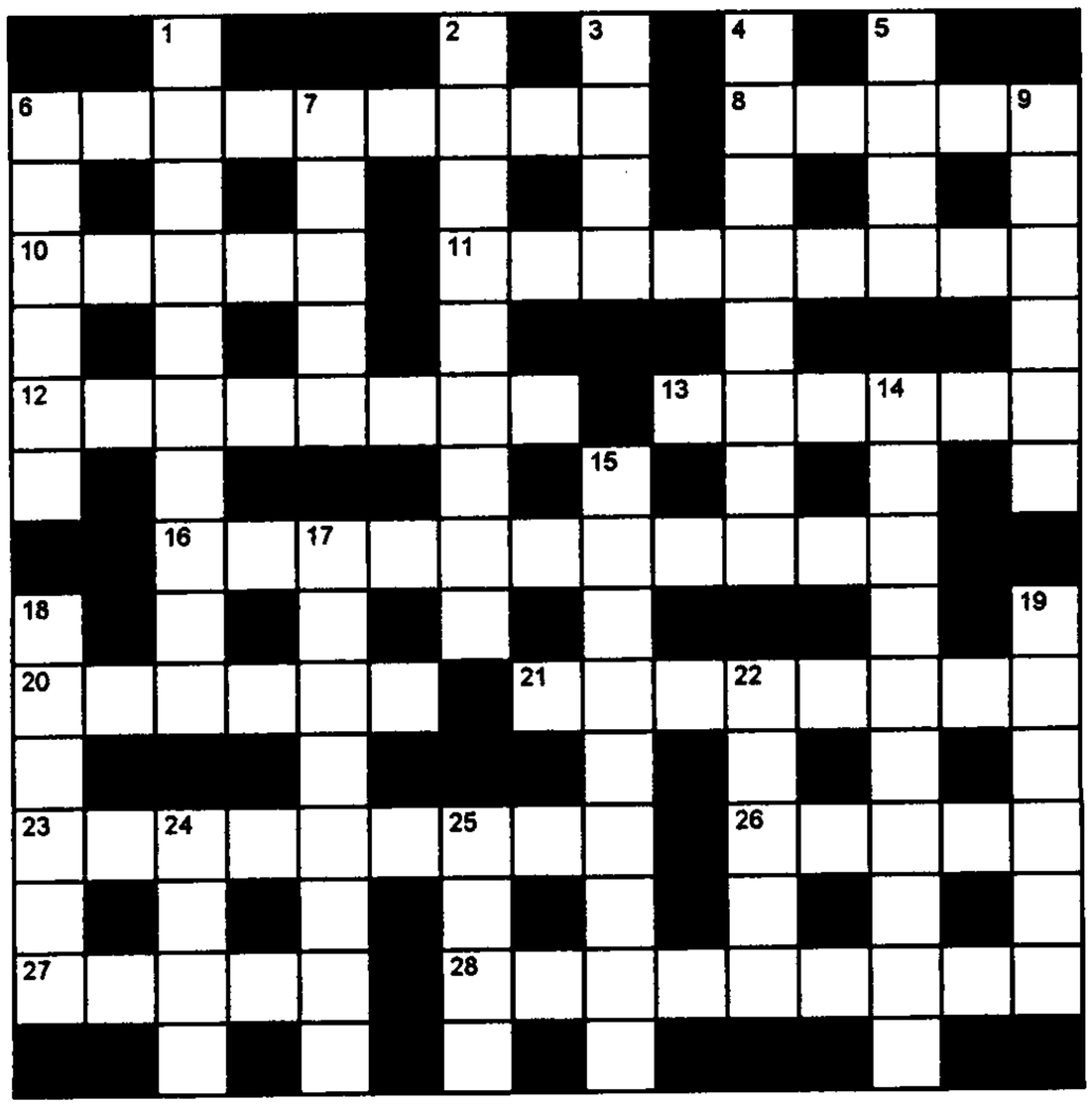
"Arsenal stars dodge millions in taxes" screamed the front page headline on 18 July. The premiership champions' use of employee benefit trusts and other tax avoidance manoeuvres for its players first appeared here in May 2003.

"BAe probed on £60m Saudi slush fund" was the front page headline the following week with a full page inside. This would have come as no surprise to readers of the *Guardian* which has been banging on about this for months prompting an investigation by the Serious Farce Office which was discussed here last March.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 267

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 13 August 2004.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

6/4 How the tabloids would give us a hot time? (4,4,1,8)

8 Press reveals "Russell gets end away on date!"

10 After brief Saturday wild love making finish the crossword (5)

11 Gruel – a lot – could produce a tight pain in the arse (5,4)

12 Parliamentary knocker very depressing at bar (5,3)

13 Members at their thickest associate leader of Tories with really good times (6)

16 Like the tabloid headline: "Mop taken to little brat!" (5-6)

20 Lulu – do, pray, take the piss (6)

21 "Roger's back an absurdity" – Viz-style humour? (4,4)

23 A boost for knockers of Brown, read another way (9)

26 Ian Paisley's heart flutters embracing unknown quantity of extreme right-wingers (5)

27 TV presenter alternative – more ornament than use? (5)

28 Is this the fashionable new love of all things old? (9)

DOWN

1 Shearer ill-suited to describe the old George Best? (4-6)

2 Hitler's genital combination point for preventing tanks from going over the top (9)

3/25 Fringe group appears first in "Multiple One-on-One Violations" (4,4)

4 See 6 Across

5/24 Is it needed to hide Charles's love-bites from snog between chukkas? (4,4)

6 " ... soft buttocks on heartless beauty ..." – don't stop! (4,2)

7 Crew screwed Kay, the old banger (5)

9 Can't stand the game of cricket, as they say in Kingston? (6)

14 Emile's mounted by ugly woman, a rather ripe cheesy lump? (10)

15 Richard Desmond, a Bonn PRO? Right unlikely! (4,5)

17 Women getting on and tossing Lord Snead North off (3,5)

18 Was sick of Penny interrupting directions with "Get married!" (6)

19 Bloody drink the lead up to Suez? (3,3)

22 One buttock next to companion's tuft (5)

24 See 5

25 See 3

Crossword 266 winner: PETER MACRITCHIE

ACROSS: 1/13/15 When the shit hits the fan 5 Pimples 9 Libellous 10 Yummy 11 Inlay 12 Ignorance 17 Sugary 18 Claptrap 22 Aggressor 24 Baste 26 Crossbill 27 Relapse 28 Simpson.

DOWN: 1 Wellies 2 Embalming 3 Telly 4 Egotist 5/25 Posing pouch 6 Mayorship 7 Lemon 8 Soy bean 14 Horsewhip 16 Foreskins 17 Slapper 19 Lardons 20 Preplan 21 Psyche 23 Gruel 24 Bosom.

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HELP – HUSBAND SICK. Kids to support. Losing property. Failed business. Trying to survive. Please help. Thank you. S/C: 30-94-41. A/C: 00852889.

21-YEAR-OLD GIRL took me for everything. No fool like an old fool. Can you help? HSBC, S/C: 40-18-39. A/C 51207105.

TRANSVESTITE needs new clothes to cheer herself up after brain tumour, thanks. susan_tv_99@yahoo.co.uk Natwest, S/C: 60-04-35. A/C: 34955496.

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DAUGHTER caring for terminally ill father. Compassionate leave over. Please help. Lloyds TSB, S/C: 77-50-24. A/C: 23493950.

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GRADUATE with huge debts needs help. HSBC, S/C: 40-19-27. A/C: 71212435.

YOUNG JUMP JOCKEY, difficult trainer, needs new start, please help. Barclays, S/C: 20-60-38. A/C: 00532738.

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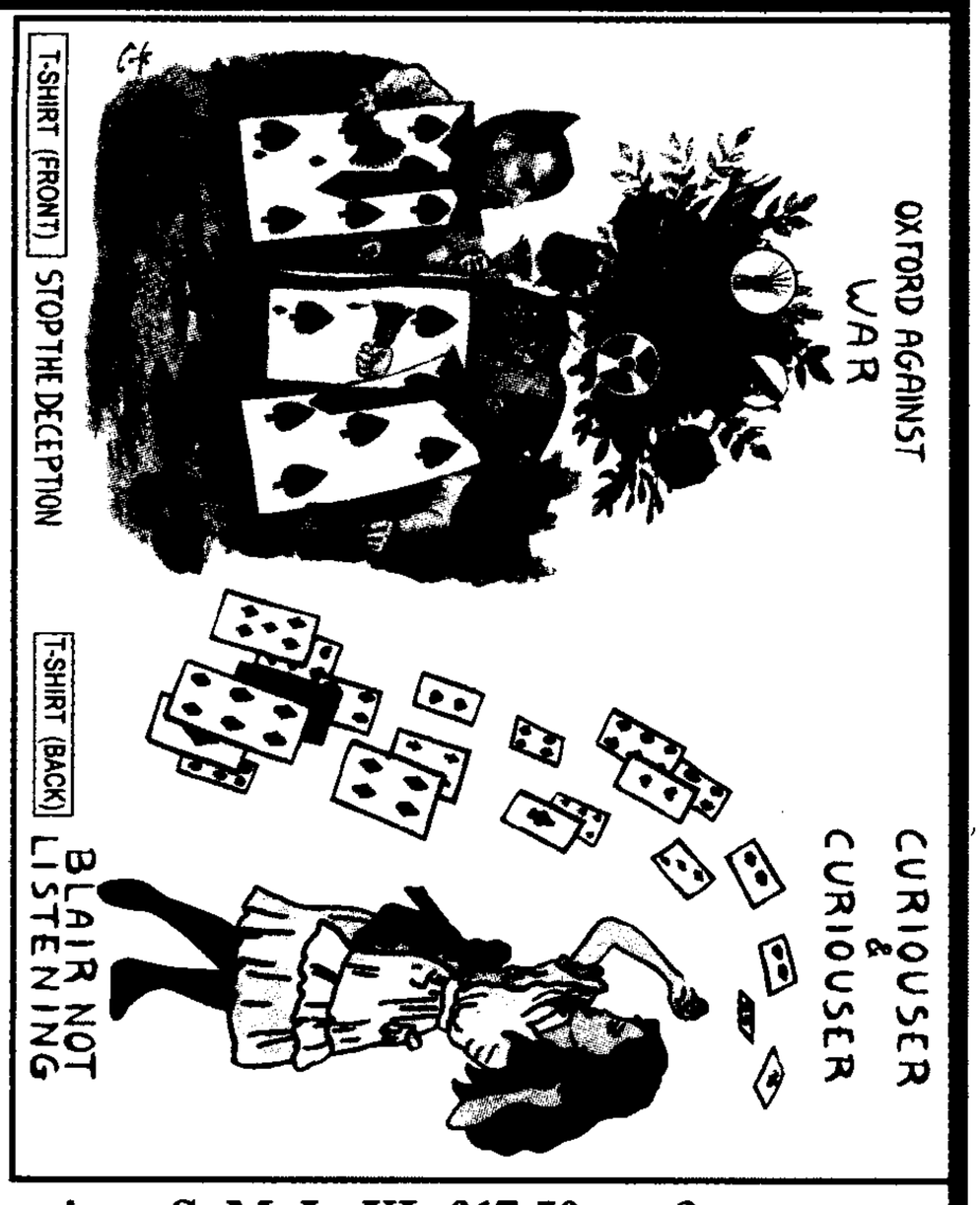

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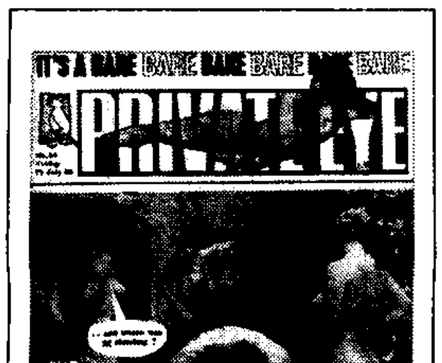

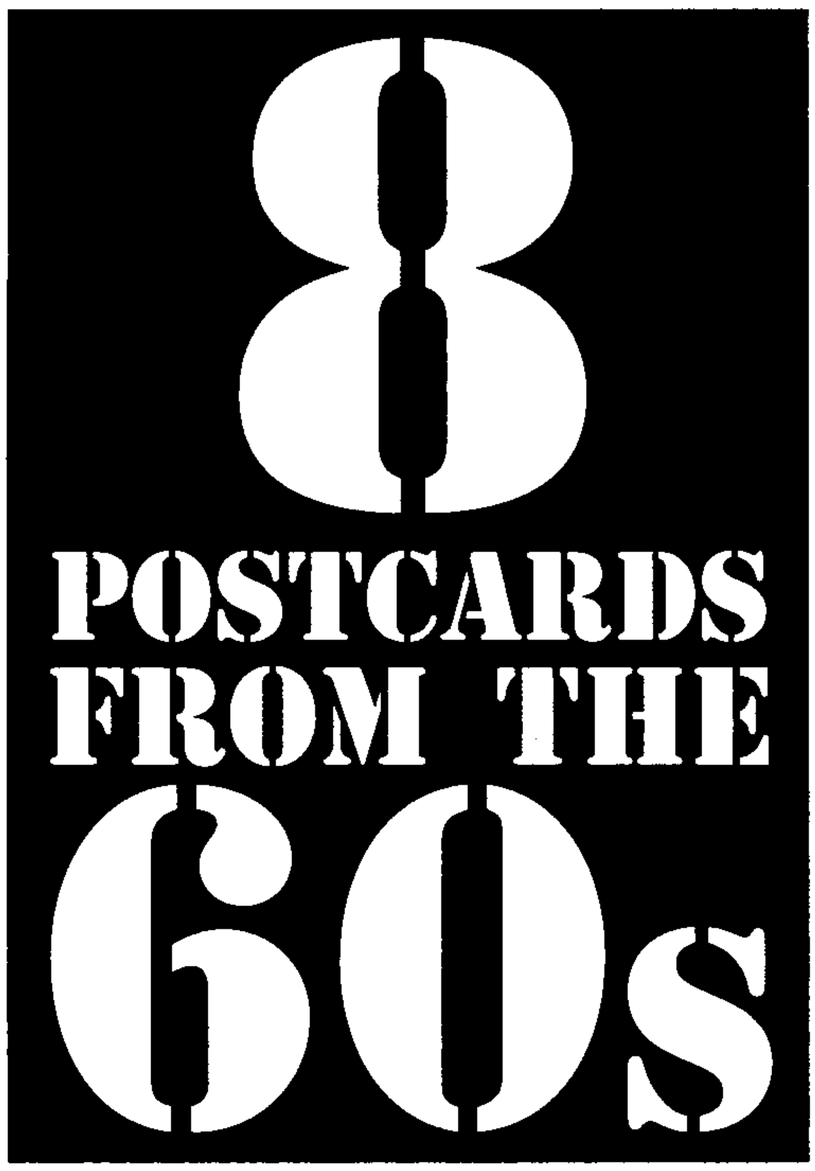

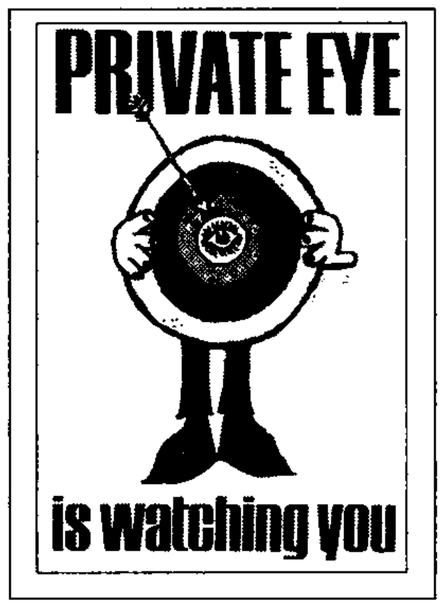

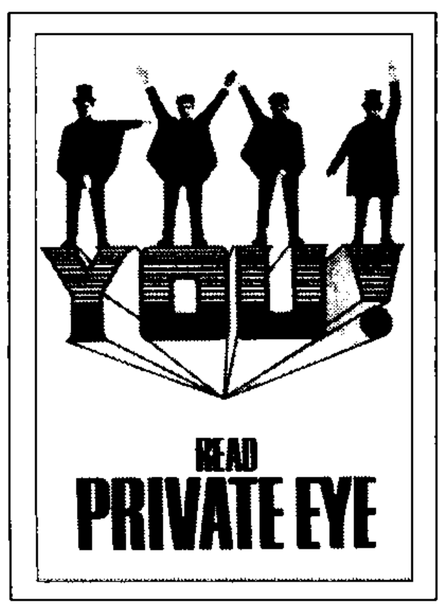

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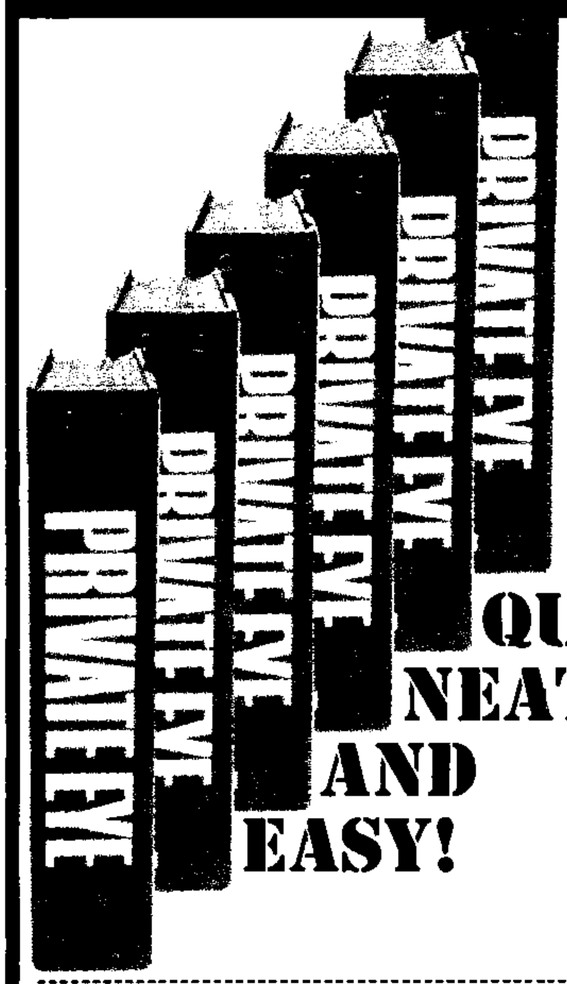

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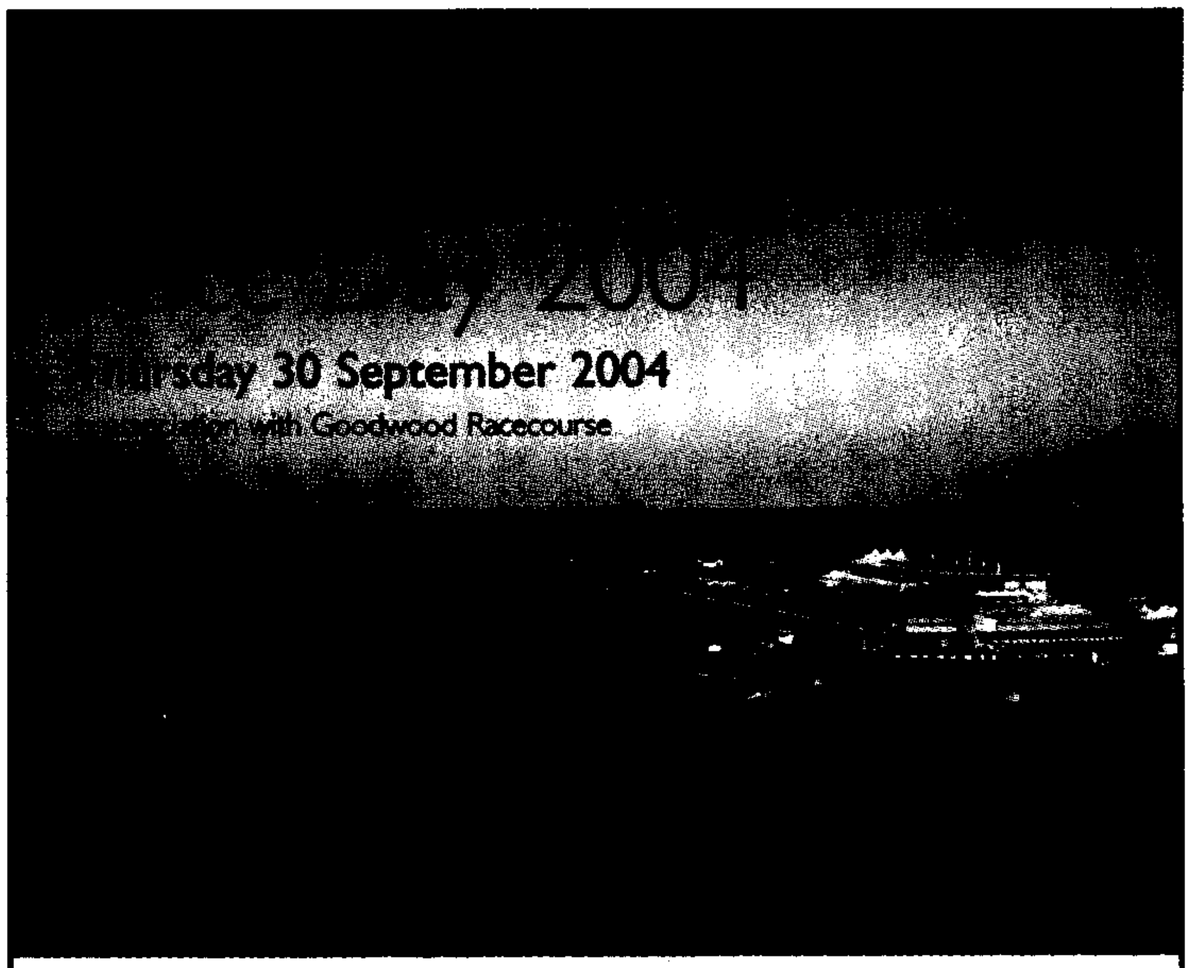

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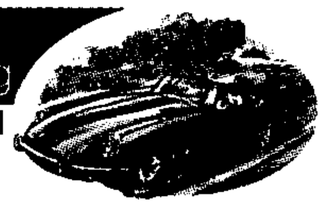

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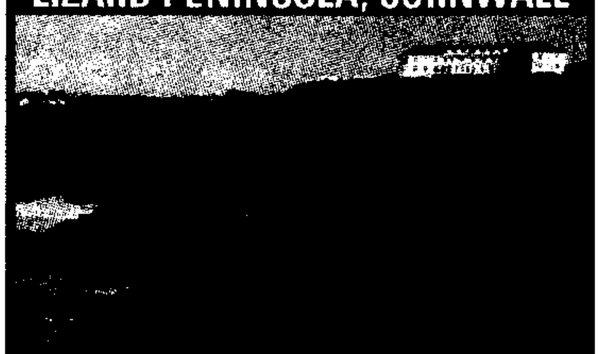

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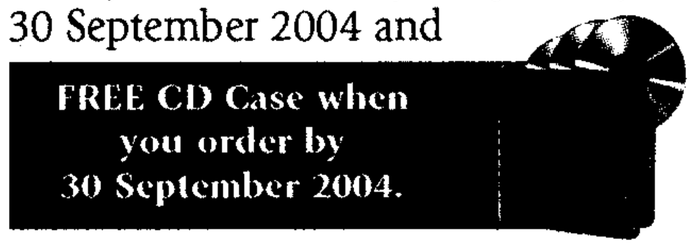

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